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# *Wordsworth and Coleridge 1795-1834*

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H. M. MARGOLIOUTH



*Geoffrey Cumberlege*

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## NOTE

MORE than twenty years ago I thought of writing a study of Wordsworth. I desisted when I learned that Professor de Selincourt was editing the *Letters*. I did not think that a satisfactory new study could be written until the new material was available. The present little book makes no attempt to be a complete study of either Wordsworth or Coleridge, but my obligations to Professor de Selincourt's lifelong work on Wordsworth, though obvious, must not go unacknowledged. Without his work on the *Letters*, *The Prelude*, the *Poetical Works*, the *Journals* of Dorothy Wordsworth and her *Life* I could have done nothing at all.

Coleridge has still to wait for the publication of the similar comprehensive edition of his letters, but my debts are great to the work of Professor E. L. Griggs, Mr. Lawrence Hanson and Sir Edmund Chambers.

I have of course many other debts, of which the Select Bibliography indicates the chief.

H. M. M.

*February 1952*

Handwritten text in Arabic script, likely a signature or a short note, located in the upper left corner of the page.



# CONTENTS

NOTE . . . . .	v
I. THE FRUITFUL MEETING . . . . .	1
II. THE FIRSTFRUITS OF THE MEETING . . . . .	22
III. GERMANY . . . . .	41
IV. NORTHWARD HO! . . . . .	64
V. THE BEGINNINGS OF DEJECTION . . . . .	85
VI. WORDSWORTH MARRIED . . . . .	107
VII. WORDSWORTH'S 'POEM TO COLERIDGE' . . . . .	127
VIII. CHANGE AND DECAY . . . . .	147
IX. TWO OLD GENTLEMEN . . . . .	174
CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE . . . . .	195
SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	201
INDEX . . . . .	203



## Chapter One

### THE FRUITFUL MEETING

‘He did not keep to the high road, but leapt over a gate and bounded down the pathless field.’

SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE came up to Jesus College, Cambridge, on 16 October 1791. William Wordsworth, B.A., of St. John’s College had returned there the previous month with the idea, not his but Uncle William’s, of studying Oriental languages. In November he was at Brighton on his way to France. There is no evidence or likelihood that the two young men met in Cambridge or even that either of them heard of the other, but a year later Wordsworth’s brother Christopher came up to Trinity. He and Coleridge did meet. Perhaps Coleridge heard of Wordsworth’s *Descriptive Sketches* and *An Evening Walk*, published in London at the beginning of 1793, and sought out the author’s brother: perhaps Christopher, already acquainted with his senior at Jesus, brought the poems to his notice. At any rate Coleridge admired them. He and others were still discussing them in the following November.

At the beginning of 1795 Coleridge was in London. So, a few weeks later, was Wordsworth. Coleridge soon went to Bristol, Southey’s native place. Wordsworth followed in August to stay with friends named Pinney.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For the Pinney family see R. Pares, *A West-India Fortune* (1950).

## 2 WORDSWORTH AND COLERIDGE 1795-1834

It was at this time in Bristol that Coleridge and Wordsworth first met. 'I saw but little of him' wrote Wordsworth in October. 'I wished indeed to have seen more—his talent appears to me very great. I met with Southey also.' It may have been the Bristol publisher Joseph Cottle who brought them together: the postscript to Wordsworth's first letter to Cottle, dated 7 January 1796, runs 'Best compts to Coleridge and say I wish much to hear from him.' In a letter to another friend in the previous November he mentioned 'Southey, a friend of Coleridge' in a way which shows that he had met Southey through Coleridge.

Coleridge's recollections in *Biographia Literaria* (1817) are not always exact.<sup>1</sup> He postdates by a year his first acquaintance with Wordsworth's 1793 poems. His statement that he first met Wordsworth in his twenty-fourth year, i.e. after 21 October 1795, is certainly also wrong. He seems to couple it with hearing Wordsworth recite *Guilt and Sorrow*, but the fact is that that poem, then called 'Salisbury Plain', was taken to Bristol on 6 March 1796 by young Azariah ('Aza') Pinney from Racedown, where Aza and his brother had just completed a four weeks' visit to the Wordsworths, who were occupying, rent-free and furnished, the Pinney family house. Aza delivered it to

<sup>1</sup> An amusing example of Coleridge's inexactness is his 1796 dating of the whole of *The Eolian Harp* as 20 August 1795. The first fifteen and a half lines with white jasmine, the scent of bean-flowers, and the harp in the future (first draft, Rugby School MS.), belong to that day, but the poem as a whole is a honeymoon poem. Coleridge and Sarah Fricker were married on 4 October 1795. The date was omitted in the 1797 edition.



Cottle with a request that Cottle should get Coleridge to inspect it. Coleridge pronounced it a very fine poem and was full of plans for its publication. The 'People that sell *The Watchman*' were to help. He sent it to Lamb who was ill but read it 'not without delight', but he was too ill to return it personally to Wordsworth, then (April or May 1796) apparently on a visit to London. Nothing came of the publication plans.

It was in April 1796, in a note to his *Poems on Various Subjects*, that Coleridge made his first public pronouncement on Wordsworth. In *Epistle I: Lines Written at Shurton Bars, near Bridgewater*, he had written of the glow-worm moving 'with green radiance through the grass'. His note is

The expression 'green radiance' is borrowed from Mr. Wordsworth, a Poet whose versification is occasionally harsh and his diction too frequently obscure; but whom I deem unrivalled among the writers of the present day in manly sentiment, novel imagery, and vivid colouring.

This note must have been written before Coleridge received 'Salisbury Plain'. The two criticisms of Wordsworth's versification and the estimate that in style and subject-matter he, in three respects, was superior to all contemporaries must be based on *An Evening Walk* and *Descriptive Sketches*.

Nearly a year later, at about the end of March 1797, Wordsworth, perhaps as a result of a chance meeting with Coleridge in Bristol, paid him a visit at his new home at Nether Stowey. Nether Stowey, where Coleridge had been living with his wife and child

since the last day of 1796, was well to the west of the direct route from Bristol to Racedown, to which Wordsworth was returning, but an extra score or so of miles was nothing to such an inveterate walker. He found Coleridge, in the latter's words, in 'a depression too dreadful to be described. . . . Wordsworth's conversation, etc. roused me somewhat'—but only somewhat. The spark was not yet struck, not even by the reading of poems which one supposes is meant by that 'etc.' The spark was at last struck when, on 5 June, Coleridge went eagerly to Racedown to pay a return visit and, for the first time, met Dorothy. The visit either was repeated almost at once or, more likely, lasted nearly the whole of June.

Four days later, on 2 July, the enthusiastic Coleridge came back again with a one-horse chaise to take the Wordsworths to visit him at Nether Stowey. Exactly a fortnight later they moved into Alfoxden. Wordsworth and Coleridge were within easy walking distance of one another—*Lyrical Ballads* could begin.

They had much in common. Both were country-born and early orphaned. Both in their short adult lives had been determinedly independent and original and therefore poor. Both had been living in the country, Wordsworth with 'a garden, orchard and every other convenience', Coleridge with rustic ideas which have not always received proper attention. The idea of living on the land and producing his own food took firm hold of him in the middle of 1794 when he became a pantisocrat. The taking of the Clevedon cottage where he spent his honeymoon in the autumn of 1795



sprang partly from that idea, and the idea recurred strongly a year later when his first child, Hartley, was born. It came to nothing and was not founded on self-knowledge, but it was much more than a passing whim. It was now reinforced both by the necessity of living cheaply and by his ideals for his child. 'I am anxious', he wrote, 'that my children should be bred up from earliest infancy in the simplicity of peasants, their food, dress, and habits completely rustic.' That was what clinched the decision to settle at Stowey, even in the only cottage available, which had, however, an acre and a half of ground. It had to be at Stowey and nowhere else because he must depend on his friend Poole there to teach him '*practical* husbandry and horticulture': but the general servant would milk the cow, she was to be 'scientific in vaccimulgence'. '*My farm* will be a garden of one acre and a half, in which I mean to raise vegetables and corn for myself and wife, and feed a couple of snouted and grunting cousins from the refuse.' The husbandry and horticulture had already come to nothing by June when Coleridge went to Racedown, but Coleridge's keenness on peasant life was a link with Wordsworth. It may even have helped to make clear to Wordsworth Wordsworth's own latent feelings on the subject. Little Hartley was already designed to be a living example of one of the main principles of *Lyrical Ballads*.

The political sympathies of the two were also similar, though Coleridge, the junior by two and a half years, had been inflamed with real enthusiasm for the French Revolution about two and a half years later than



Wordsworth. Wordsworth had been in France, he had seen the Revolutionary army and assembly and had taken the side of one faction. When, in the summer of 1794, he heard with joy of the death of Robespierre, Coleridge had only just reached the full height of enthusiasm by meeting his new Oxford friend, Southey. Indeed earlier in the year he had been a dragoon and likely to be sent to fight the French. It is possible that his four months as a trooper made him realize that the average English soldier was not an idealist and predisposed him to become an opponent of the war. It was forgotten, as it often is even now, that it was France which declared war: it had to be learnt by harsh experience that the friends of freedom can easily become the friends of no freedom but their own.

Pitt's government was in these years deeply concerned over possible 'fifth column' activities, yet what has been rather absurdly called the 'counter-Terror' was mild indeed by twentieth-century standards. Prosecutions were according to law; there were famous acquittals: there was only one execution in addition to a few transportations to Australia, which since 1775 had succeeded America for convict settlement. At the time when Wordsworth joined Coleridge in Somerset, prosecutions, quite unjustified, were going on as a result of the abortive French landing in Pembrokeshire in February 1797. The French ships had sailed up the Bristol Channel before that landing. When, only five months after that alarming event, mysterious strangers appeared at Alfoxden, it is not surprising that they were suspected as foreigners. Their accent was strange,

they did not observe Sunday, they must be French—‘an emigrant family’, it was said, and not all refugees can be trusted. The news reached a doctor whose home was in Bath: he reported it to the Government. A detective was sent to watch and report. He found that they were not French, but they and ‘Coldridge’ were democrats (i.e. revolutionaries) and they had had as a guest the notorious John Thelwall, a leading democrat whose acquittal on a treason charge in 1794 had not made him less suspect.

Wordsworth had published nothing indicative of political opinions, nothing of importance of any kind since his two 1793 poems, nor had he done any public speaking. The more impetuous Coleridge, on the other hand, had in 1795 delivered lectures in Bristol, and had published some, *The Plot Discovered* and *Conciones ad Populum*, which left no doubt about where he stood, anti-Pitt and against the war, though using a good deal of judgement about the French Revolution. In 1796 had appeared the ten numbers of *The Watchman*, about which he later wrote so amusingly in *Biographia Literaria*, and in the same year his *Poems on Various Subjects*, of which a second edition (with many changes) was in the press at the time of his visit to Racedown. Some of the poems had first appeared in periodicals. They contain much besides politics, but the politics are unrestrained. Pitt

kiss'd his country with Iscariot mouth.

And that country itself was apostrophized as

O doom'd to fall, enslav'd and vile,  
O Albion! O my mother Isle!



Wordsworth had privately rejoiced at defeats such as those of Dunkirk and Quiberon, and at Racedown he had been working at a political verse satire based on Juvenal. He had his own special trouble over the war in that it had separated him from Annette Vallon, from whom one letter at least filtered through in 1796 though many others failed to do so.

Both poets, however, were ready to put invective and indignation in a lower place and to give fuller play to more expansive feelings. Wordsworth's note would be more often deep and solemn, Coleridge's more often gentle or plaintive: at their best Wordsworth would convince, Coleridge would hypnotize. At the moment he was hypnotized himself, by Wordsworth's powerful character and by Dorothy's 'innocent soul' and 'her taste, a perfect electrometer'. Dorothy, for her part, marked 'every emotion of his animated mind'. She may well have had something to do with her brother's taking so thoroughly to Coleridge at Racedown. 'She gave me eyes, she gave me ears': perhaps she also gave him that 'most loving Soul', Coleridge—she and Coleridge's own power of love and admiration and, ambivalent influence, Coleridge's ability to satisfy Wordsworth's bent for rationalizing his experiences. And was it perhaps Coleridge's admiration of Dorothy which somehow clinched his admiration of William?

Though Wordsworth had published only the two considerable 1793 poems (1,259 lines), he had written much more. He was an indefatigable reviser and kept some poems for decades before publishing them. His mere *juvenilia* which survive occupy fifty-eight pages

(say 2,300 lines) of de Selincourt's edition. *Guilt and Sorrow's* seventy-four Spenserian stanzas were in 1797 represented by a 'Salisbury Plain' of much the same length. The five Acts of his one play *The Borderers* were finished and were read to Coleridge at Racedown. So, a more important matter, was 'William's new poem *The Ruined Cottage*', with which Coleridge 'was much delighted' and which was eventually incorporated in the first Book of *The Excursion*. In 1797 it was a comparatively short poem, for Wordsworth, who went on working at it, reported in March 1798 that it had grown (apparently more than doubled) to 900 lines.

The two poets were thus able to consider each other's performance as well as promise. Even *The Borderers* was balanced by Coleridge's *Osorio*, two and a half acts of which tragedy Coleridge repeated to William and Dorothy at Racedown—'repeated', be it noted, is the word, though William 'read' his tragedy. Coleridge had a prodigious verbal memory, and could doubtless improvise well enough if it failed him.

Both poets had a background of uncomfortable amatory experience, yet very different. We know of nothing in Wordsworth's early life which quite corresponds with Coleridge's tender and delicate love for Mary Evans, sister of a former school-fellow. If only Coleridge had married her! Instead he had fallen suddenly in love with Sarah Fricker, sister of Southey's fiancée, had fallen out of love with her and had nevertheless, under pressure from Southey and for the sake of Pantisocracy, returned, fallen mildly in love again,



and married her. So far the marriage seemed a success, but the deadly error was to show itself.

Wordsworth had been saved by the French war from a similar mistake. He had certainly been in-fatuated and taken outside himself by Annette. Nothing could be more un-Wordsworth-like than the picture of the father-to-be made to kiss the baby-clothes which his inamorata was making ready in the summer of 1792 for the December birth. It was his one passionate love affair, but it was out of the true line of development of his deepest nature. Not there, whatever may have been true of Blake, did the soul expand its wing. If there had been no child, would Wordsworth have thought of marriage? Though there was a child, one must remember how very much 'natural' children were accepted as a matter of course. There were the children of the Royal Dukes, though their circumstances were special—marriage was barred by law. But Wordsworth's West Indian cousin Tom Myers had a natural daughter whom Dorothy writes about in the most straightforward way as possibly to be put in her charge at Racedown. It did not happen, but the motherless little Basil Montagu whom she did have at both Racedown and Alfoxden was the son of a natural son of the Earl of Sandwich. Away in Sussex William Hayley, whose *Triumphs of Temper* everyone knew and who had declined the laureateship, had, like Jacob, taken a handmaid when his wife failed him and had become father of a son who was the pride of his life. If Wordsworth had had a natural child whom he acknowledged and provided for, the world

in general would have thought little the worse of him.

It is important to remember this because no mere question of making Annette 'an honest woman' troubled Wordsworth. He was very much in love with her. Whatever the difficulties caused by French marriage law in the confusion of 1792 and by differences of nationality and religion and political sympathies, and whatever temporary and youthful doctrinaire ideas about marriage he may have had at first, he soon ardently desired to marry<sup>1</sup> and support her. On his way back to England he had stayed several weeks in Paris, obviously in the hope of solving his financial problem there by obtaining journalistic employment.<sup>2</sup> In the same hope he published his two poems. Then the war came. There is very strong evidence that he got back into France in October 1793. He very probably had a hurried and unhappy day with Annette. He was in enemy country, was warned of danger and escaped. It is all to his credit, but it may have begun the disillusionment. We know what Annette was like from the letters to William and Dorothy which she wrote at Blois on 20 March 1793 and which never left that

<sup>1</sup> The French law of 20 September 1792 removed some impediments, but they were not such as would have prevented an earlier marriage if both parties were determined on it. Godwin's marriage in 1797, against his previously declared opinions, to Mary Wollstonecraft when with child may be some sort of parallel, so far as concerns Wordsworth's wishes.

<sup>2</sup> This is, perhaps, the more prosaic picture of what the 'paramount mind' (*Prelude*, 1805, x, 180-9) thought it might have achieved in Paris but for the 'absolute want of funds for my support'.



town. Very loving, but dreadfully sentimental, voluble, half-educated, with no intellectual interests, no 'electrometer' like Dorothy, she was no mate for William Wordsworth. If they had married, it would have ruined him. He might even have taken Holy Orders to ensure a livelihood, and given up poetry to become a bishop. Annette might have risen to the occasion, but the husband, at least, would have lost his soul. As it was, both found them—Annette as a brave 'underground' worker for the royalist cause. Another possibility, which Wordsworth certainly had in mind though Annette might have had different views, was emigration to America.

If we turn from love affairs to money affairs we find a marked difference, although for both poets there was the background of the not yet extinct age of patronage. Wordsworth, though not yet knowledgeable about money, was naturally prudent: Coleridge was not. We never hear of Wordsworth being badly in debt: 'One thing however I can boast, and on that one thing I rely, extreme frugality.'<sup>1</sup> He and Dorothy lived at Windy Brow in 1794 chiefly on bread, milk and potatoes. It is doubtful if they had much more at Racedown. Calvert's legacy of £900 had been partly invested<sup>2</sup> with Basil Montagu. It is pretty certain that he was not always punctual with the interest or with payment for the care and maintenance of little Basil. After the Racedown period we find Montagu

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 7 November 1794.

<sup>2</sup> The payment of the legacy was not completed for over three years.



badgering the well-to-do Pinneys for money in order that he should not let Wordsworth down. The Alfoxden rent was only £23 a year. That Wordsworth had no money to spare there is shown by the story of the walking tour of William, Dorothy and Coleridge from Alfoxden to Lynton and back by Dulverton to defray the expenses of which they planned a poem for a new magazine. So began *The Ancient Mariner*. Wordsworth and his family, however, were not debtors but creditors. For years they went on trying to get out of the Earl of Lonsdale the money belonging to his former steward, their father. When, in 1802, the Earl died, they got it—about £8,500 between the five of them.

Coleridge had no such expectations, nor was he prudent. He was at Cambridge as a sizar with a leaving exhibition from Christ's Hospital, to which he soon added another scholarship confined to sons of the clergy, and he had some help from his elder brothers. He ought to have been all right, but the innocent freshman was visited by a tradesman who asked how he would like his rooms furnished. 'Just as you please, sir', said Coleridge, and by the time of his enlistment his main debts amounted to £132. His brothers paid, but thereafter he was always being helped and always in difficulty, though much of the help was of the patronage kind—as indeed was Wordsworth's legacy from Calvert. The patronage culminated in January 1798 in an annuity of £150 from the brothers Wedgwood of the great pottery firm at Etruria. Before that other friends had clubbed together to produce £35 to £40 a year, and there had been not inconsiderable

earnings from journalism though *The Watchman* was a financial failure. There had been a plan for a school which ended in one adult and intermittent pupil, Charles Lloyd. There was soon to be an opening as a paid Unitarian minister in Shropshire: it was his first trial sermon which young Hazlitt heard. The Wedgwoods' munificence came of set purpose at this moment and he returned to Stowey.<sup>1</sup>

Coleridge, the son of a country parson and in his later years the philosopher of Trinitarianism, had from his Cambridge days been a Unitarian. He could never do without a religious life. This was his fundamental difference from Wordsworth, who could never do without a moral life.

They were very different in general appearance. Coleridge was five feet nine or ten inches in height: he was loose-limbed and fond of jumping over gates, hedges and streams: he was badly-groomed like his horse when he was a trooper. He liked to walk with his hat off, a twentieth-century habit which even at the beginning of the twentieth century was confined to 'blue-coat boys'. 'Longish loose growing half-curling roughish black hair'<sup>2</sup> framed a round fresh-coloured face with small nose, thick parted lips (he could not breathe through his nose) and 'not very good teeth': but he had 'fine dark eyebrows and an overhanging forehead' and those wonderful grey eyes the light of which so impressed beholders, when, as so often, he was animated, that they differ even about their colour. 'His eye is large and full, not dark but grey; such an

<sup>1</sup> See p. 19.

<sup>2</sup> Dorothy's description in June 1797.



eye as would receive from a heavy soul the dullest expression; but it speaks every emotion of his animated mind; it has more of the "poet's eye in a fine frenzy rolling" than I ever witnessed.' Dorothy, the affectionate but exact observer, is amply borne out by others. That eye was like the Ancient Mariner's but more so: it could hold fascinated not merely a single guest but whole parties—and, of course, there were those, including his own family, who were not fascinated. Of the effect of his voice, accounts are more varied. Some were repelled by his Devonshire accent and pronunciation which sounded the *l* in such words as 'talk': some found his incessant conversation (or *one*versation) monotonous, though he could be a good listener when he thought it worth while: but most yielded to his brilliancy of idea, the darting light which he shed on everything about which he spoke, and the glow and play of his eyes. For Coleridge had an inner sight which never ceased to struggle against, and often to break triumphantly through, what were soon to be the multitudinous infirmities of the body and the will.

He was still under twenty-five. Peter Vandyke's full-face portrait of him, painted two years earlier and now in the National Portrait Gallery, conforms to Dorothy's description except that she found him 'pale and thin'. Robert Hancock's three-quarter face drawing, also in the National Portrait Gallery, was probably done in 1796 but, unlike Vandyke's, it shows him more looked at than looking.

Wordsworth's appearance at this time is best known

from the frequently reproduced and unprepossessing drawing made by Hancock in 1798 and also in the National Portrait Gallery. It is in profile: the big nose and slightly sloping forehead give him a sharper facial angle than Coleridge. His hair is already beginning to recede. He looks tough, not scintillating. The 'fire in his eye', recorded in 1817 by Hazlitt relating his first sight of him in 1798, is absent from the picture. Nevertheless there is ample evidence that Wordsworth's eye, if not an Ancient Mariner's, had a brooding beauty which was of the essence of his personality. His mouth, firmer than Coleridge's, was in no way tight-lipped. His height was much the same as Coleridge's. He had a rolling walk, and one thinks of him less as an impetuous leaper over obstacles than as a stately and skilful skater on the frozen lakes. Like Coleridge he had a country accent, though a different one. He was personally better groomed, but, though used to horses all his life, was not clever with them.

It was probably on Sunday 16 July 1797<sup>1</sup> that the Wordsworths moved into Alfoxden. They had little portable property but books and clothes, and moving from one furnished house to another by way of a visit to the Coleridges' cottage at Nether Stowey was an easy matter. Basil and the maid Peggy must have come on soon after from Racedown with whatever they had left behind. Coleridge and his wife accompanied them to Alfoxden, but Sarah went back next day (Monday)

<sup>1</sup> The agreement was signed on 14 July. Dorothy on Monday 14 August says they moved 'a month yesterday', i.e. Sunday four weeks, the feminine month.



to 'superintend' the weekly wash. In the evening Thelwall turned up at Stowey, and he and Sarah arrived at Alfoxden on Tuesday before breakfast. Later in the day Thelwall wrote to his wife of 'the most philosophical party', 'the enthusiastic group consisting of C. and his Sara, W. and his sister, and myself, without any servant, male or female. An old woman, who lives in an adjoining cottage, does what is requisite for our simple wants.' Thelwall stayed at Alfoxden and Stowey for some time, which scandalized the neighbours and was reported by the detective.

The *annus mirabilis* may be reckoned as exactly a year, from Sunday 2 July 1797 when Coleridge fetched the Wordsworths to Stowey until Monday 2 July 1798 when they left Stowey for Bristol. The year falls into three parts: five months of close intimacy (July to November), two months when Wordsworth and Coleridge can have seen very little of one another (December and January), five months of renewed regular contact (February to June). During the first five months there were no long absences from the almost joint Alfoxden-Stowey home. Coleridge went to Bristol in August and walked the forty miles back. In September he went to Donhead near Shaftesbury to consult Bowles, author of the Sonnets, about his tragedy *Osorio*, and he may have gone on then to London; he was away somewhere for a day or two in October, but, for one so restless as Coleridge, that is surprisingly little. Wordsworth, too, paid one visit to Bristol. They both got their tragedies off to London, and both tragedies had been rejected before the end

of the year. That did not matter. What mattered were the two walking tours undertaken by William, Dorothy and Coleridge with which the five months culminated. Both tours were westwards to Lynton. On the first, either coming or returning, Coleridge was taken ill<sup>1</sup> with 'dysentery' (Wordsworth in 1834 spoke of Coleridge's 'frightful internal pain, which sometimes caused him, when they walked together in Somersetshire, to throw himself down and writhe like a worm upon the ground'). He retired for a day or two to a lonely farmhouse a quarter of a mile from Culbone Church, took two grains of opium for his trouble—and wrote *Kubla Khan*, which would have been longer if 'a person on business from Porlock' had not intruded and checked the poet's inspiration. The second tour which began at dusk on Monday 13 November, may have been undertaken because Coleridge had not been well enough to complete the first. On the way to Watchet *The Ancient Mariner* was planned and that evening the two poets began its composition.

They must have travelled light on their numerous walks and walking tours. Milk and bread would have been obtained from farms or cottages when they were hungry. There is no mention of bundle or knapsack. Was a razor in a pocket all that was carried, and did the paid or unpaid host for the night sometimes throw in a change of linen or a washing of stockings? Yet one wonders about books. Purchas's *Pilgrimage* was only

<sup>1</sup> This seems a certain inference. Only on a long walk would Coleridge have retired for such a reason to Culbone, more than twenty miles from his home. On none of the four other known Lynton walks can this have happened.



obtainable in folio. Did Coleridge carry a copy on the walk from which he had to retire to the farm at Culbone? Or did he read the sentence over which he fell asleep from a notebook? Or not read it at all but bring it forth 'not laboriously, but luckily' from his capacious and retentive memory?

At the beginning of December the Wordsworths went to London. They left London on 15 December by coach for Bristol where they stayed till 3 January. Meanwhile Coleridge, after a visit to Bristol which resulted in a small salaried job for the *Morning Post*, had received £100 from the Wedgwoods to save him from becoming a paid Unitarian minister. After ten days he returned it and on 13 January arrived at Shrewsbury to deliver his trial sermons. On Sunday 14 January he preached with great success; on Monday he stayed with the Hazlitts at Wem, ten miles off; on Tuesday he received from the Wedgwoods the offer of £150 a year for life. He accepted it, but stayed on to preach the other two sermons expected of him and was back at Stowey by 2 February after what must, poetically, have been an unprofitable two months.

Not so the second five months period which now began. Dorothy's *Journal*, which survives for most of it, has many parallels with *Christabel* (Part I) which was then being written. *Frost at Midnight* and *France: An Ode* belong to February, and *The Nightingale* and *Fears in Solitude* to April. A 'ballad' was finished on 18 February and again finished on 23 March. In May there were great walks. Coleridge walked eleven miles over the hills to Taunton on Sunday 13 May and



took services there. At 1.30 on the Monday morning his second child, Berkeley, was born. Three letters which Coleridge wrote at Stowey that morning, the first at 3 a.m. survive. On Wednesday afternoon he set out with the Wordsworths for Cheddar. They slept at Bridgewater and were probably back home on Thursday night. Next week they walked again to Cheddar, sleeping this time at Cross near Axbridge. William, instead of coming straight home, went off on an errand to Bristol. He probably brought Cottle, the publisher, back with him to Alfoxden. He, too, seems to have been a forty-miles-a-day walker.<sup>1</sup> They went off to Lynton. On that walk the volume ultimately called *Lyrical Ballads* was planned and decided upon: Wordsworth had hinted at it in an eager letter to Cottle written on 9 May. Almost immediately Coleridge walked again to Lynton, one day there and one day back. In June young Hazlitt came to Stowey for three weeks. There was another walk to Lynton, this time with a stay there of two nights. Soon after Coleridge must have taken the London coach, for we find him paying a visit at Brentford and then paying another to Josiah Wedgwood at Stoke d'Abernon in Surrey. One hardly sees how he can have been back home by Saturday 23 June, when the Wordsworths, their lease of Alfoxden terminating the next day, came to Stowey to stay till the anniversary of their arrival there on 2 July.

The twelve months were, beyond all question, the

<sup>1</sup> So, a few years earlier, had been young William Blake and his wife.

most fruitful of Coleridge's poetical life. What of Wordsworth? Nearly all his contributions to *Lyrical Ballads*, except *Tintern Abbey* written just afterwards, belong to the same twelve months, but he had done more than that. He had more than doubled the length of *The Ruined Cottage*; he had written several hundred lines afterwards, almost certainly, embodied in *The Prelude* or *The Excursion* which both grew out of *The Recluse* on which he was working hard in February and March; and he had written *Peter Bell*. The difference between Wordsworth and Coleridge is that Coleridge had had a brilliantly meteoric year never to be repeated, Wordsworth had begun to burn with a steady light which was to grow for several years in range and intensity.

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## Chapter Two

### THE FIRSTFRUITS OF THE MEETING

‘That summer when on Quantock’s grassy Hills  
Far ranging, and among her sylvan Combs . . .’

INDEED all that year was summer in their young hearts. Even the weather, except for part of February and March, was genial. There were the November walks. From 20 January we have Dorothy’s *Journal* for four months. Sunday 21 January was ‘a warm day’ and the morning of Sunday 4 February was ‘warm and sunny’ after the ‘mild morning’ and ‘moonlight still and warm as a summer’s night at nine o’clock’ of the day before. Not till Friday 16 February was there any snow. It lay deep on the ground the next day but did not prevent walks. Even on Wednesday 7 March there was still ‘one only leaf upon the top of a tree—the sole remaining leaf’ which ‘danced round and round like a rag blown by the wind’. Coleridge had been in bed at Stowey for some days with a fever caused by the stump of a tooth (one remembers the ‘not very good teeth’ of Dorothy’s description the year before), and on both the 6th and 7th Dorothy, accompanied on the 7th by William, went over to see him. On the 8th Coleridge was well enough to come and see them. On that day or the day before Dorothy must have described the leaf which was to be

immortalized in *Christabel*. From the 9th to the 18th the Coleridges stayed at Alfoxden. The weather was mostly cold but not without sunshine. Coleridge came back to dinner on the 23rd bringing 'his ballad finished'. That must be *The Ancient Mariner*. He seems to have gone straight on to *Christabel* where

'Tis a month before the month of May,  
And the Spring comes slowly up this way.

Dorothy writes of the late spring on 24 March and 6 April, but with Easter Sunday on 8 April spring came on apace. Perhaps Wordsworth's 'first mild day of March' was really in April. One has constantly to remember that Wordsworth was a professional poet, not a meteorological nor any other kind of factual reporter.

The cold weather of March did not freeze his inspiration. A hail shower on Sunday the 18th, from which he and Dorothy (returning from escorting their visitors half-way home) had to shelter 'under the hollies', was the occasion of 'A whirl-blast from behind the hill'. Another hail-storm on the following day caught William, Dorothy and little Basil Montagu on their return from the top of the Quantocks, but William had noticed something and began *The Thorn*. A month later, in the evening of 20 April, they once more passed the thorn and the 'little muddy pond'. The poem was finished, perhaps by the 'wearisome composition' in which its author had been engaged all the morning. That day or evening a better poem, *Peter Bell*, was begun.



Six days later William 'went to have his picture taken', and the painter was expected at Alfoxden on Sunday 6 May. This was W. Shuter whose portrait<sup>1</sup> gives a very different impression from that made by Hancock in this same year. Shuter shows the full face with long hair some of which hangs in untidy wisps over his forehead. The lips are parted just enough to show the row of good upper teeth, and the whole expression is one of a queer, if slightly subdued gaiety. One remembers Hazlitt's description of 'a convulsive inclination to laughter about the mouth' but that is not exactly what one sees. What one perceives is rather the 'happy moments', the 'glee', with which Wordsworth, at about this time, wrote *The Idiot Boy*, and therewith the strange lack of self-critical acumen which made him put some poems in a class to which they do not belong—to confuse, in fact, emotional intensity with imaginative insight.

Coleridge, who had a fair share of Lamb's kind of humour, had something to do with this gaiety, but the sense of release, which both felt from the middle of 1797 as their almost daily companionship had its effect, worked more immediately upon Coleridge. He had finished *Osorio* and sent it off in the middle of October. He was, and had been for years, deep in all sorts of out-of-the-way books including travel books. His letter written to Thelwall on 19 November 1796 gives the background of *Kubla Khan* and *The Ancient Mariner*:

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<sup>1</sup> Reproduced in *Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth* (ed. de Selincourt) and in L. Hanson, *Life of S. T. Coleridge*.

I am, and ever have been, a great reader, and have read almost everything—a library cormorant. I am *deep* in all out of the way books, whether of the monkish times, or of the puritanical era. I have read and digested [i.e. made an abstract of] most of the historical writers; but I do not *like* history. Metaphysics and poetry and ‘facts of mind’, that is, accounts of all the strange phantasms that ever possessed ‘your philosophy’; dreamers, from Thoth the Egyptian to Taylor the English pagan, are my darling studies. In short, I seldom read except to amuse myself, and I am almost always reading.

The best of his poetry hitherto had had the conversational simplicity and sweetness of *The Eolian Harp*. Much of it had been spoilt by current politics or been overburdened and turgid like *Religious Musings*, which nevertheless sent Lamb into raptures, though there is no turgidity in *Osorio* which had occupied the middle six months of 1797. Now on an autumn day a walk, an attack of illness, an anodyne, a sentence from Purchas—all after some months of the most satisfying companionship and exchange of thoughts he had ever had—fused the clear visual images which his reading gave him into the most musical and most magnificent of dream poems. The whole fusion is exhibited in the minutest detail in Livingston Lowes’s *The Road to Xanadu*. There is nothing intrinsically novel in the metre. It is not a deliberate imitation of Percy’s ballads as is *The Ancient Mariner*, nor a deliberately accentual work like *Christabel*. Released from all that had spoilt or limited his previous verse Coleridge reached perfection in a trance.



In Xānadu  
did Kubla Khān

just came, as such things do come when there is nothing to stop them. A similar repetition of vowel sounds in inverse order came nine months later to Wordsworth composing *Tintern Abbey*—

The still sad mu|sic of |humanity.

In *Kubla Khan* Coleridge wrote of an enclosed paradise with a palace of art on smooth water between two turbulences, of past and future. Past and future meet in the 'ancestral voices prophesying war'. The height of imagination, visual and auditory ('a damsel with a dulcimer'), could alone do justice to this palace, and anyone so inspired would be an object of 'holy dread'. What would have followed if the poem had been completed? In fact it is complete. No 'person from Porlock' could have checked for ever what came from the depths of inspired imagination. What actually followed in a week or two was the beginning of *The Ancient Mariner*. In that poem there is a further and vaster fusion of the visual images which had come to Coleridge from his books, especially his travel books, but the subject of *The Ancient Mariner* is the fundamental one of sin, suffering and redemption.

That was going far beyond what Wordsworth had in mind. For we owe the central act of *The Ancient Mariner* to the fruitful meeting in a more particular way than we owe *Kubla Khan*. Wordsworth had been reading a travel book: but why? Had he caught the habit from Coleridge, who had been deep in travel

books for some years? Captain George Shelvocke, a noted privateer, had, in 1726, published *A Voyage round the World by the Way of the Great South Sea*, i.e. a voyage like the Ancient Mariner's round Cape Horn and up into the Pacific. During Shelvocke's voyage one of his officers shot a black albatross<sup>1</sup> which had persistently followed the ship in bad weather. This is the deed on which the action of *The Ancient Mariner* hinges, and it was Wordsworth's most important contribution to the poem. He also suggested the navigation of the ship by the dead men—not necessarily, of course, during that November walk and talk. The few lines, such as the comparison of the Mariner to 'the ribbed sea-sand', contributed by Wordsworth cannot be dated. Much of the poem belongs to February and March and must have been discussed frequently and in detail.

It is probable that Coleridge had read Shelvocke. The book did not come from the Bristol library from which Coleridge was a regular borrower, but it may have come from the Stowey library run by his friend Tom Poole, a master-tanner of liberal views and culture and, until Wordsworth came to Alfoxden, Coleridge's most intimate friend. Not from that library (for Coleridge knew it long before he came to Stowey and book-buying was his one luxury) came William Bartram's *Travels through North and South Carolina, Georgia, East and West Florida* etc., first published at Philadelphia in 1791, which was to supply

<sup>1</sup> A smaller bird than the great white albatross, which could not be hung round a man's neck.



so much of the scenery of Wordsworth's *Ruth* and which, with Shelvocke and James Bruce's *Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile* (1790) and many another story of strange adventure, provided those brilliant visual images present to Coleridge's inner eye, and often to his outward eye, as he wrote *The Ancient Mariner*. All that has been expounded amply and finally in *The Road to Xanadu*.

*The Ancient Mariner*, as we read it now, is, in most respects, an even finer poem than as finished by Coleridge in March 1798 and published in *Lyrical Ballads* later in the year, but there was no change of action or structure. The subsequent changes, such as the elimination of most of the archaisms and the addition of the beautiful marginal glosses, were in detail only. It is Coleridge's one perfect and complete long poem. We approach it through the portal of *Kubla Khan*. We leave its strange seas for the carefully worked, but incomplete, Gothic witchery of *Christabel*, of which only the first Part belongs to this spring of 1798.

Except for the correspondences with passages in Dorothy's *Journal*, of which the two most important have been mentioned above, and perhaps the northern word 'tairn' (tarn) there is no sign here of any direct Wordsworth influence, but it is probable that *Christabel* is the one poem begun by Coleridge in accordance with the division of labour for *Lyrical Ballads* later described by him in the well-known passage in Chapter XIV of *Biographia Literaria*:

. . . it was agreed, that my endeavours should be directed to persons and characters supernatural, or at

least romantic; yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith. Mr. Wordsworth, on the other hand, was to propose to himself as his object, to give the charm of novelty to things of every day, and to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural, by awakening the mind's attention from the lethargy of custom, and directing it to the loveliness and the wonders of the world before us; an inexhaustible treasure, but for which, in consequence of the film of familiarity and selfish solicitude, we have eyes, yet see not, ears that hear not, and hearts that neither feel nor understand.

With this view I wrote 'The Ancient Mariner', and was preparing among other poems, 'The Dark Ladie', and the 'Christabel'.

Now, at the beginning, Coleridge and Wordsworth had attempted to collaborate in writing *The Ancient Mariner* but had soon found it impossible. The agreement recorded in *Biographia Literaria* must have resulted from the clear realization of their different bents. It was a well-founded plan, but perhaps not very many of the poems which actually appeared in *Lyrical Ballads* were written because of it. *Peter Bell*, Wordsworth's counterpart of *The Ancient Mariner*, did not appear in that volume, nor, probably because they were merely a beginning, did the 331 lines of Part I of *Christabel*.

It is easy to see why Coleridge got no further than he did that year if we look at his doings from 23 March when *The Ancient Mariner* was brought to Alfoxden completed. *Christabel* itself he wrote taking immense pains over its metre 'founded on a new principle:



namely, that of counting in each line the accents, not the syllables'. *Fears in Solitude* is described as 'written in April 1798, during the alarm of an invasion'. *The Nightingale* is dated in the same month and *Lewti* (developed from a boyish poem of Wordsworth's) was published in the *Morning Post* on 13 April and *The Recantation: An Ode* (later called *France: An Ode*) on 16 April. At the end of the month the publication of his former pupil Charles Lloyd's novel *Edmund Oliver* brought such deep distress to Coleridge that 'it prevented my finishing the Christabel'. The novel made some use of confidential talk by Coleridge about his experience as a dragoon and had other passages unfavourably applicable to him. It had been finished the previous November and there may have been some coolness between the two men before that. Further coolness developed in the spring and then came the novel with a dedication to Lamb. Southey, Mrs. Coleridge's brother-in-law, also seemed to be behind Lloyd, who was certainly a mischief-maker. Coleridge and Lamb, former school-fellows, were usually steady friends. This was the only occasion on which the friendship was clouded. Coleridge tried hard, but failed, to get Lloyd to meet him and have the matter out. The apparent defection of Lamb must have been the bitterest contribution to a bitter time. Coleridge did not leave home,<sup>1</sup> though his later

<sup>1</sup> I accept Sir Edmund Chambers's brilliant suggestion (*Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, p. 101) that in Dorothy's *Journal* as published 'Wrote to Coleridge' under 9 May is an editorial mistake for 'Wrote to Cottle', 'Cot' having been misread as 'Col'.



recollections tended to be confused. He was waiting for the birth of his second child. He had been away and had hurried home, when Hartley was born, but Hartley came long before he was expected.<sup>1</sup> The second child, Berkeley, must, if anything, have been overdue: he was a big baby. Of the two Cheddar walks we have already spoken.<sup>2</sup> In between those walks their friend Tom Poole lost his brother. On Sunday 20 May Coleridge sent a note of deep sympathy to his house, asking whether he should come round or not.

It is obvious that no poetry can have been written in May. At the end of the month came Cottle's visit and the decision about *Lyrical Ballads*. June was taken up first by young Hazlitt's visit and then by Coleridge's own absence. Then the Wordsworths went from Alfoxden, there was Germany to be planned for, there was a visit in August with Wordsworth to Thelwall at Liswyn (Llyswen), and on 16 September they embarked at Yarmouth. Coleridge was not writing during this summer. His great poetical period comprised four or perhaps five active months, November and perhaps December 1797 and February, March, April 1798.

*Christabel* itself, for all the beauty of the Somerset moonlight scene and of the matchless verse, could not really have been completed except as an artificial *tour de force*. To start a long poem on a theory of division of labour with another poet is to ask for difficulty.

<sup>1</sup> He was born on 19 September 1796. Mrs. Coleridge had what was (in all probability erroneously) supposed to be a long-expected miscarriage on the previous 19 March.

<sup>2</sup> Page 20.

It was to be romantic. He took the name Christabel, unknown in England for centuries, from the re-written ballad *Sir Cauline* in Percy's *Reliques*, where she is a king's daughter. He never seems to have known how his story was to develop or even, perhaps, what exactly was wrong with Geraldine's 'bosom and half her side'. Part I, which is all we are now considering, suggests that the spell was mesmeric like the Ancient Mariner's eye in the *Lyrical Ballads* version:

For that, which comes out of thine eye, doth make  
My body and soul to be still.

The great mass of Coleridge's pictured images which found each its appointed place in *The Ancient Mariner* plays little part in *Christabel*, of which the sweet, cool tones are often more like those of the conversational poems. Yet there is one noticeable resemblance—in both the evidence for the uncanny experiences depends on one highly wrought witness alone.

The volume for which *Christabel* was not ready was called *Lyrical Ballads*. No trace remains of the talks which must have resulted in that name, but its origin is to be found in the opening poem, Coleridge's 'ballad', *The Ancient Mariner*. The ballads are lyrical: they contain more guides to feeling than the old ballads: 'the feeling therein developed gives importance to the action and situation and not the action and situation to the feeling', as Wordsworth put it in the preface to the second (1800) edition. It is because of the feeling, the lyrical element, that we must accept the story, willingly suspend our disbelief in the mere



happenings of *The Ancient Mariner* or be interested in such trivialities as the mere story of *Simon Lee* or *The Idiot Boy*. The final title of the book was 'Lyrical Ballads, With a Few Other Poems'. It is not quite easy to draw the line, but nearly half are 'other poems' rather than 'lyrical ballads'. Of Coleridge's four contributions, two were excerpts from his tragedy *Osorio* and one was 'a Conversational Poem'. Wordsworth's contributions numbered nineteen, but his actual preponderance is much less than this figure suggests. Coleridge contributed nearly one third of the volume (which was published anonymously), and of its two poems of supreme value, the first and last in the book, Coleridge wrote the first and Wordsworth the last, an afterthought, *Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey, on revisiting the banks of the Wye during a tour, July 13, 1798*.

That glorious afterthought had nothing whatever to do with the plan of the volume. It is not a lyrical ballad, but a philosophical lyric. It is not one of the 'experiments' referred to in the 'Advertisement' or Preface. There is no attempt in it 'to ascertain how far the language of conversation in the middle and lower classes of society is adapted to the purposes of poetic pleasure'. Wordsworth is not attempting 'to give the charm of novelty to things of every day' or 'to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination'. The volume, to begin which Cottle had taken *The Ancient Mariner* with him from Alfoxden at the end of May, was already in the press, and it was to see it through the press in Bristol that the Wordsworths went there



from Stowey on Monday, 2 July. Their headquarters and address for letters was at their publisher's 'Mr. Cottle's, Wine Street, Bristol', but their lodgings were at Shirehampton, nearer the mouth of the Avon. But long walks were a need of their nature and in the second week off they went for four strenuous days. On the first day they walked to the Severn ferry, crossed by it and then walked by the Wye to Tintern: on the second they walked farther up through Monmouth to Goodrich, the scene five years earlier of the incident already recounted in the volume in the press as *We Are Seven*: on the third day they walked down the valley back to Tintern and on to Chepstow and then returned by boat to Tintern for the night: on the fourth they embarked at Tintern in 'a small vessel' for some point on the left bank of the Severn and so returned to Bristol. Tintern was the centre of that walk. 'Above Tintern Abbey' and 'upon leaving Tintern, after crossing the Wye', therefore early on the second day of the walk, the poem came to Wordsworth. It was with him for the rest of the walk and in the boat. The last passage was composed as they walked down the hill from Clifton to Bristol in the evening: the glow of those four days of physical and imaginative achievement was in him, and yet, going downhill at the end into the city and so-called real life, he felt a shiver of that misgiving about the future which was to grow on him

. . . Oh! then,  
If solitude, or fear, or pain, or grief,  
Should be thy portion . . .

*Tintern Abbey* is *The Prelude* in little. It shows Wordsworth understanding what mattered most in himself. He could not have written it a year before. Coleridge taught him introspection and provided him with a technique, here flawlessly used. If ever there was a philosophic poem, this is one. Its argument, even its alternative lines of argument ('If this Be but a vain belief, yet . . .'), is perfectly clear and its imaginative insight and expression unsurpassed. Surely they walked that evening into Bristol instead of straight back to Shirehampton in order that William might at once write it down at Cottle's and have it added to the book. There was room on the fourteenth sheet. There was not time to verify the 'admirable line of Young, the exact expression of which I cannot recollect'. Next Wednesday Dorothy wrote to a friend — 'William's poems are now in the press; they will be out in six weeks.' She was a little optimistic, but they seem to have been published in September.

Wordsworth's ballad contributions are in direct contrast with Coleridge's. This was due less to a planned division of labour than to a divergence of aim and temperament. They had tried collaboration without effect and not only in *The Ancient Mariner* (Coleridge had a fancy for joint work, witness his and Southey's *Joan of Arc*; and for combined volumes such as the *Poems* by Coleridge, Lamb and Lloyd). Coleridge, or one part of him, was a real romantic, and Coleridge noted Wordsworth's matter-of-factness. In *Goody Blake, and Harry Gill*, *A True Story* Wordsworth shows how, in contrast with *The Ancient Mariner*, a



curse really works. He took the story from Erasmus Darwin, stated in the 'Advertisement' that it happened in Warwickshire, located it in his poem in Dorsetshire with all the circumstances of the winter he had known at Racedown, and borrowed the surname of its chief character from the Pinneys' careful steward at Racedown, Joseph Gill. There was never so matter-of-fact a thing as a name given to the Ancient Mariner or to any of the characters in that story.

It is not easy to assess Wordsworth's ballads. They were aggressively and consciously modernistic, and they had the merits and some of them the still greater demerits of most aggressively and consciously modernistic poetry. Coleridge had, temporarily, found himself and thereby stimulated Wordsworth to do likewise but with an immense difference. *The Thorn* has its admirers. 'Its triumph', writes Miss Darbishire, 'is in its fusion of the elements, the human passion and the natural scene, so that each expresses itself in and through the other.' For me that fusion does not exist and *The Thorn* is one of Wordsworth's failures. One knows its genesis, sees exactly what Wordsworth is doing and aiming at doing, but does it come off? And how very odd to call the woman Martha Ray, for Martha Ray was the name of the grandmother of his and Dorothy's little charge, Basil Montagu, and she was the victim of a notorious murder in 1779.

Little Basil, delightfully described in Dorothy's letters (he called her 'Aunt'), is mentioned by William, in the first Racedown March, as lying 'like a little devil'. He is the hero of *Anecdote for Fathers*, shewing



*how the Art of Lying may be taught.* Here, in accordance with Wordsworth's fairly general habit, names are changed. Basil becomes Edward, and Racedown and Alfoxden are represented by Kilve (which is not many miles from Alfoxden) and Liswyn (where Thelwall was living) respectively. So in *Simon Lee* 'the sweet shire of Cardigan' is substituted for Somerset; the original of the old huntsman lived near the entrance to Alfoxden Park.

It is in *The Idiot Boy*, much the longest of Wordsworth's contributions to the book, that the strength as well as the weakness of his ballads is most clearly seen. The story is nothing, and Byron, who wrote of 'the idiot mother of an idiot boy' and made other even ruder remarks, was saying what many felt and feel. Yet Wordsworth does get right inside his characters. The ballad does contain 'a natural delineation of human passions, human characters, and human incidents', or, to look forward from the 1798 'Advertisement' to the 1800 'Preface', Wordsworth does make the 'incidents of common life interesting by tracing in them . . . the primary laws of our nature'. Betty Foy is such a simpleton that, in her, maternal affection and anxiety can be seen quite unalloyed, all the more because the object of that affection and anxiety is her son and nothing else, an 'idiot boy' utterly devoid of any accomplishment or any vice. Realistic too are the doctor roused from his sleep and Susan Gale, good woman, whose anxiety overcomes her illness. Yet not here are the saving beauties of the poem. They are in the owls and the moonlight. The

whole poem is bathed in moonlight—suitably, one might say, for a sort of lunatic midsummer-night's dream, March though it be. Johnny had been in the moonlight 'from eight o'clock till five'. How the moon had shone that spring! It shone when Coleridge, making entries in his notebook, picked up the weeping Hartley and

. . . hurried with him to our orchard plot,  
And he beholds the moon, and hush'd at once  
Suspends his sobs, and laughs most silently . . .

as he recorded both in the notebook and in *The Nightingale*. 'The moving moon went up the sky' in *The Ancient Mariner* and shone on the harbour as the Mariner neared home. The 'horned moon' shone in Dorothy's *Journal* on the very day that Coleridge brought his ballad finished. The moon was full, though 'small and dull', in *Christabel*. The story of *Peter Bell*, now written though not published till 1819, begins 'All by the moonlight river-side'. Not to Keats—not to 'him, even'—can the moon have brought more poetry than to these two in this spring of 1798, and it is in *The Idiot Boy* that this moon is at the full.

Yet, as of most things in 'Nature', one of its parents is literary. This is the moon of Gray's *Elegy*.

The moping owl does to the moon complain.

It, and still more the owls, had been Wordsworth's since his first boyish verses.<sup>1</sup> The owls provide the choric accompaniment to *The Idiot Boy*: with 'the owlet in the moonlight air' it starts, and it ends with

<sup>1</sup> See Miss Darbishire, *The Poet Wordsworth*, pp. 17, 18.



an elaboration of the original half-wit's actual remark <sup>1</sup> that 'the cocks did crow, and the moon did shine so cold'. That is set against a background of expected dawn:

By this the stars were almost gone,  
The moon was setting on the hill,  
So pale you scarcely looked at her:  
The little birds began to stir,  
Though yet their tongues were still.

How perfectly those vowels have arranged themselves, and how those 'st's give needed strength to the verse.

In spite of *The Owl and the Nightingale* owls have not been a favourite bird-subject for poets, but in *Lyrical Ballads* we have not only Coleridge's *The Nightingale*, a delightful and original poem, but Wordsworth's most original and genuine poetry about birds. Do not his owls surpass his skylark, his linnet, his robin, his nightingale, even his stockdove? Since it was Wordsworth himself who, as a boy, 'blew mimic hootings to the silent owls', they may have been his first love among the birds. That partly explains the 'glee' with which *The Idiot Boy* was written. That uncritical glee also presages the barren future when Wordsworth was to condemn his early favourite among the birds, now silent indeed, to become a type and name for all bad poetry. The curious will look up the sonnet which begins

While Anna's peers and early playmates tread . . .

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<sup>1</sup> *Thomas Poole and his Friends* (1888), i, p. 264.



That was thirty years on. At present he was taking in and giving out. The giving out began later than Coleridge's: it began only in the second of the two five-month periods, but it came with a rush. Wordsworth did not, as Coleridge did, stop at the end of April. He never stopped. His aim, unlike Coleridge's, was a single aim, to be a poet. Though still little known, he had arrived. He went on. He wrote too much and for too long, but he wrote greatly. He poured out his 'comprehensive soul'. He was the greatest English poet since Milton. So Coleridge thought. So Wordsworth thought. So, when all deductions have been made and whatever the iconoclasts or the over-clever may have said or say, has England thought ever since England got over Byron-fever.

## *Chapter Three*

### GERMANY

‘I travelled among unknown men’

WHEN the excellent but notorious Thelwall turned up to breakfast at Alfoxden House on that Tuesday in July 1797 and stayed nearby till August, he did something towards deflecting the course of English poetry. Mrs. St. Albyn, the owner,<sup>1</sup> may have forgiven her agent for his mistake in letting it to one of the wild men, but she firmly refused a renewal after Mid-summer 1798. Wordsworth would have remained in Somerset if he could, but there was a scarcity of available houses large or small and he easily fell in with Coleridge's desire to visit Germany, the home of the newest philosophy. If there had been a second year at Alfoxden, we cannot say what would have followed—perhaps a permanent settlement in Somerset. Wordsworth was not so wedded to his native north: he had spent comparatively little time there since leaving school. There might have been no Lake School, but a Quantock School, of poetry. If Coleridge had never been lured to Keswick, he might never have become an opium addict and his marriage might have been saved. Southey, of course, would not have gone there. Wordsworth might not have married and had to divide

<sup>1</sup> The actual owner was a minor. Hence the availability of the house.



his aims. I think we should still have had *Tintern Abbey*, for it was due. We might, perhaps, have lost the Lucy poems, born of bitter nostalgia in Germany. We might not have had the Scottish tour and all its poetry, but there would have been equally fruitful Welsh tours. We should have had neither the benefits nor the disadvantages of that imaginative inbreeding which resulted from Wordsworth's return to the home of his childhood. Instead we might have had for another thirty years that imaginative cross-breeding of great but diverse minds which went on through the *annus mirabilis*. Thelwall's unlucky visit was to cut short the goodliest fellowship of famous poets which our literature has known.

The Wordsworths stayed in the neighbourhood of Bristol and the Coleridges at Stowey till it was time to set out for London on the way to Germany. Coleridge came in to Bristol, perhaps more than once. On one evening, presumably at Shirehampton, he suddenly proposed a Welsh walking tour, and at six o'clock next morning off the three went. 'We had a very pleasant tour', wrote Wordsworth, 'along the banks of the Usk and the Wye, into Brecknockshire.' They can hardly have recovered the glory of the Tintern days of the month before: in any case Wordsworth could compose with Dorothy by his side, but not in the actual company of Coleridge. The 'hypochondria' in Wordsworth, of which at later dates Coleridge complained, was sometimes the silence of poetry in the womb but unable to be born till the pressure of even the most wonderful talk was removed. The object of the walk, which

Wordsworth did not mention to his correspondent, was to visit Thelwall who lived at Llyswen in Brecknockshire, a village on the Wye a few miles above Talgarth. Coleridge, writing beforehand, talks of a 'return per viam Swansea usque ad Bridgewater'. If they really did that, they had quite a voyage of about fifty miles across and along the Bristol Channel as a preparation for crossing the North Sea.

On 27 August the Wordsworths arrived in London, having seen Blenheim and Oxford on the way. There was a London end of *Lyrical Ballads* to attend to. Coleridge had another publication to arrange, that of a one-and-sixpenny book containing *Fears in Solitude*, *France* and *Frost at Midnight*. It may also have been as late as this that *The Nightingale* was substituted for *Lewti* in *Lyrical Ballads*. The object was to secure anonymity, *Lewti* having already appeared in the *Morning Post*. The exchange was much to the good. It must have delayed publication, which took place after the departure for Germany. They departed at eleven in the morning of Sunday 16 September from Yarmouth. Coleridge's wife and two infants naturally remained at Stowey, but there travelled with him and accompanied him for the whole German visit, presumably at his own charges, one John Chester of Nether Stowey, a young man (rather mischievously described by Hazlitt in 1823 in *My First Acquaintance with Poets*) who was devoted to Coleridge and was his self-appointed Sancho Panza.

They had to sail from Yarmouth because of the war. The Channel crossing, which Wordsworth had made



twice certainly, three times probably, each way, was impossible. So were the shorter North Sea crossings. The French held the Austrian Netherlands (Belgium) and had set up the satellite Batavian Republic in Holland, which was therefore at war with England ('9 Dutch ships taken, with 3,000 troops Bravo'<sup>1</sup>, wrote Coleridge in the Bristol Library borrowers' register on 4 or 9 November 1795—his patriotism got the better of his politics with greater resilience than did Wordsworth's). Next August (1799) Holland was to be invaded by an Anglo-Russian sea-borne army, a diversion which failed. Britannia ruled those waves—Admiral Duncan had seen to that in spite of the naval mutinies—but the coasts were hostile. In that very spring of 1798 Bonaparte had made his first assembly of landing-craft, then called flat bottoms, and Coleridge had written *Fears in Solitude* 'during the alarm of an invasion'. Now, however, Bonaparte had taken himself and an army to the Eastern Mediterranean. The war in Europe had died down. Eleven months before the poets sailed from Yarmouth Austria had made peace at Campoformio. Prussia had made peace in 1795, yielding the whole west bank of the Rhine to the French and compelling the smaller German states into an anxious neutrality. So, though the western frontier of Hanover marched with the Batavian Republic and though the Elector of Hanover and the King of England were the same person, the poets could move about Hanover and neighbouring smaller states without fear of being hustled out by an invading enemy. The war

<sup>1</sup> The Dutch surrender at the Cape of Good Hope.

was far away<sup>1</sup> and in any case news travelled very slowly. On 1 August, the anniversary of the accession of the House of Hanover, the 'boatmen of London' rowed the annual race for Doggett's Coat and Badge, 'little thinking of Admiral Nelson', as the song says, that 'tight little fellow', who was that day destroying the French fleet in the Battle of the Nile. Not for nearly two months did Dorothy, then in Hamburg, record 'all the Hamburghers full of Admiral Nelson's victory'.

So it was on the packet-boat, which regularly conveyed mails, parcels and passengers, that the party of four set out. The Wordsworths were sea-sick, Dorothy suffering dreadfully, but Coleridge survived to converse with and study the others of the eighteen passengers who were in a fit state. His account in *Satyrane's Letters*<sup>2</sup> (now embodied in *Biographia Literaria*) is a lively piece of writing. Coleridge is excellent at humorous description, Wordsworth fails. How much more Coleridge would have made of Wordsworth's account, added to Dorothy's *Journal*, of the baker who cheated him at Hamburg! Wordsworth has his eye too much on the mere object and is too much grieved at his lost coin; Coleridge, with a little exaggeration here and there and some psychological guesses, could have made it a really lively story.

<sup>1</sup> Even the French attempt to set up a satellite state in Ireland had finally collapsed on 8 September 1798.

<sup>2</sup> Based on letters written home by Coleridge at the time, first published in 1809 in *The Friend*. Satyrane is from *Faerie Queene*, I, vi. Coleridge in *The Friend* calls him 'Idoloclastes', breaker of idols.



A favourable wind, which was holding up many west-bound ships in the Elbe, brought the packet-boat opposite Cuxhaven in forty-eight hours, but it was not till four o'clock on the Wednesday that the travellers landed at Hamburg. William, having French, was the linguist of the party. The Wordsworths stayed in Hamburg a fortnight. Coleridge had letters of introduction which resulted in him and Chester being accepted as paying guests, for a minimum period of a month, at Ratzeburg, a small town on an island in a long lake, a dozen miles south of Lübeck and three times that distance north-east of Hamburg. Before going he had an interview with the aged poet Klopstock. Wordsworth was three times in Klopstock's company. The English poets were interested and compassionate, but they could not be much in sympathy with one who preferred Glover's blank verse to Milton's. 'Wordsworth and myself expressed our surprise: and my friend gave his definition and notion of harmonious verse, that it consisted (the English iambic blank verse above all) in the apt arrangement of pauses and cadences, and the sweep of whole paragraphs,

. . . with many a winding bout  
Of linked sweetness long drawn out,

and not in the even flow much less in the prominence or antithetic vigour, of single lines, which were indeed injurious to the total effect, except where they were introduced for some specific purpose. Klopstock assented, and said that he meant to confine Glover's superiority to single lines.' That hardly improved

matters, and Wordsworth's claim for the superiority of Pegasus to the rocking-horse probably passed over the old man's head, like much else that was said in a language native to none of those conversing.

Their outstanding memory of Hamburg, besides Klopstock, was bad smells. All were glad to leave it. They had come to Germany with no definite plans and with a variety of aims. To learn German thoroughly would open many books to them and might help to solve the never-ceasing financial problem. There was the ordinary *wanderlust* of youth. The Wordsworths, at least, had neither home nor ties. Coleridge, always keenly interested in natural science, hoped to learn at a German university what his English one had failed to teach him. Most of all he hoped to learn more of German philosophy and to acquire the actual books. To understand the mental and spiritual universe was his permanent passion to which all else was subsidiary. One must not listen too seriously or too exclusively to what any one of them said about it in the months preceding the adventure, but the first idea of it, in Wordsworth's mind at any rate, is well set out in a letter he wrote on 11 March 1798 to a Cumbrian friend:

We have a delightful scheme in agitation, which is rendered still more delightful by a probability which I cannot exclude from my mind that you may be induced to join in the party. We have come to a resolution, Coleridge, Mrs. Coleridge, my Sister, and myself of going into Germany, where we propose to pass the two ensuing years in order to acquire the German language, and to furnish ourselves with a tolerable stock of information



in natural science. Our plan is to settle, if possible, in a village near a University, in a pleasant, and if we can a mountainous, country; it will be desirable that the place should be as near as may be to Hamburg, on account of the expense of travelling. What do you say to this? I know that Cecilia Baldwin has great activity and spirit; may I venture to whisper a wish to her that she would consent to join this little colony? I have not forgotten your apprehensions from sea-sickness, there may be many other obstacles which I cannot divine.

This letter was written when the Coleridges were staying at Alfoxden after Coleridge's illness at the beginning of the month<sup>1</sup> and when it was clear that there would be no renewal of the Alfoxden lease. It was an enthusiastic programme, mountains and university and near Hamburg, a whole colony of English and yet German to be learnt, the complete Coleridge family, two years, and—not Annette who might conceivably have got into a neutral country, not Mary or any other Hutchinson, but, unheard of before or since, Cecilia Baldwin.

It is important to realize that there were no definite plans and that there was much ignorance of the country if we are to understand the separation in Germany of the Wordsworths and Coleridge. They parted on the last day of September 1798. The Wordsworths returned early in May, Coleridge and Chester in July 1799. They corresponded a great deal, though the posts were very slow, but they only met twice, for a matter of hours, at Göttingen. A temporary parting would help the language learning; but, when Coleridge went to

<sup>1</sup> See p. 23.

Ratzeburg for a month at least, he did not know how much he was going to enjoy himself there, and, when the Wordsworths decided to 'speculate further up in the country', they did not know how little they were going to enjoy themselves. None of them, used to the stage-coaches and easy travel of England, realized that the primitiveness of German conveyances and the abnormally bitter winter ahead would immobilize them for months.

On 3 October, when the Wordsworths left Hamburg in the Brunswick diligence, they were still thinking in terms of the soft October and November of the year before. The awful diligence took two days to Brunswick, and Dorothy was sick after four miles. Plans were still not fixed. They wanted a small town and to concentrate on learning the language, doubtless with many a ramble to farm and village, visualized as at home or at least as in the France of six years ago. Goslar had been mentioned. They knew nothing of it, but it happened that a diligence for Goslar left Brunswick at eight the next morning. They booked places and got beds for the night. Next morning, still living as cheaply as possible, William bought apples and bread for breakfast. After that Dorothy 'carried Kubla to a fountain in the neighbouring market-place, where I drank some excellent water'. Coleridge was always in their thoughts: even their drinking-*can* for use on journeys was playfully nicknamed after Coleridge's poem. One remembers the characteristic playfulness with which, in his happy days, Coleridge seldom called the Ancient Mariner anything but the Old Navigator.



In ten or twelve hours the diligence did the twenty-five miles to Goslar. They stayed there for four and a half months, from 6 October to 23 February. They lodged with a widowed linen-draper. The dull little town, in which Wordsworth found no intellectual or æsthetic interest or company, has been often enough described. They picked up enough German for commonplace purposes and for reading. Coleridge thought that, if he had been there, he would have managed to do better in the way of social intercourse. Socially, but socially only, Dorothy was a handicap to her brother. Where a single man could have accepted hospitality without being expected to return it in kind, a man and woman could not. Moreover, they were open to suspicion: 'sister' was a German euphemism for mistress. The handicap was social only. The two were necessary to one another: it was an unspotted love and friendship: we never hear of even a momentary disharmony. There could have been no question of Dorothy, whose home was wherever William was, being left behind. And, perhaps, William felt she was a safeguard against his being carried away by his feelings as in France. His love affair there, deeply felt and sincere though it was, was not in harmony with his self-dedication to poetry.

At first they had 'plenty of dry walks' and, if the weather had been good enough, would have left in November, but 'the cold season, the dreadful roads, and the uncovered carts' confined them to a place where at least they lived 'in comfort and quietness'. For weeks they had their small baggage ready to move

as soon as possible. It was a fairly mild winter in England, as the weather reports of the *Gentleman's Magazine* show, but in the Central European plain they talked, rightly or wrongly, of the coldest weather for a century. So the Wordsworths shut up in Goslar were driven in upon themselves and upon talk about the home of their childhood and other memories. The result was some of Wordsworth's finest work. This winter harvest equalled in quality that of the preceding Spring and Summer except for *Tintern Abbey*. Nor was Coleridge's help and criticism lacking. As regular a correspondence was kept up as the posts would allow. Turning back to his boyhood Wordsworth wrote much of what became the first two books of *The Prelude*. The famous passages about Nutting, Skating, and The Stolen Boat were sent to Coleridge.

The mood of *Expostulation and Reply* and *The Tables Turned* reappears in Germany in *A Poet's Epitaph*, which Wordsworth stated to have been written there, and in *Matthew, The Two April Mornings*, and *The Fountain*, all dated 1799. The first draft of *Ruth* was written from memories of Somerset and of Bartram's *Travels*. To William's recollections Dorothy added hers of a snowstorm near Halifax: *Lucy Gray; or, Solitude* gets some of its atmosphere from that German winter. Round another Lucy centre other beautiful and hitherto mysterious poems. One letter to Coleridge contains the earliest form of 'She dwelt among th' untrodden ways' and 'Strange fits of passion I have known'. An earlier letter contained 'A slumber did



my spirit seal'. Coleridge quoted it to Poole when Poole wrote to tell him his infant son Berkeley had died. 'Three years she grew in sun and shower' was written, Wordsworth said long afterwards, in the Hartz Forest: he and Dorothy walked through there at the end of February on their escape from Goslar. These four poems were published in the second (1800) edition of *Lyrical Ballads*. To the same group, not published in 1800 but included in a letter to Mary Hutchinson of April 1801, is 'I travelled among unknown men'. It belongs so completely with the other four that it is just possible that it too, in some early and unsatisfactory form, belongs to the German harvest. We know, from the early drafts we have of other poems, how much Wordsworth's lyrics often depended for their perfection on careful after-workmanship.

Lucy is not Annette or Dorothy or Mary Hutchinson, nor is she just a creation of the imagination. She was young, she died unexpectedly, she was known to Wordsworth who could have felt love for her. We know of one person, and only one, who satisfies these conditions. She is Margaret Hutchinson, two years younger than her sister Mary whom Wordsworth married in 1802. The Hutchinsons, like the Wordsworths, lost their parents early. Mary and Margaret, usually called Peggy, lived at Penrith and were school-fellows of Dorothy, Peggy (born 1772) being nearer her in age. On William's holiday and vacation rambles near Penrith all four must have been together in the summers of 1787 and 1788. Dorothy left for Forncett

in Norfolk in November 1788 and was not with them in the summer of 1789. The 'two dear Ones' (*The Prelude*, XI, 317—1805 version) with whom Wordsworth visited the Border Beacon may, therefore, be Mary and Peggy. If, as Professor de Selincourt thought quite likely, Wordsworth's 'moving backwards and forwards' in the north of England in the early months of 1794<sup>1</sup> included a visit to the Hutchinsons, he then saw Mary and Peggy again. Dorothy renewed the friendship in March 1795, when what was meant to be a short visit to them at their brothers' farm at Sockburn (in a loop of the Tees south of Darlington) was extended to several weeks because 'Mary and Peggy were so very desirous' of it. Dorothy was on her way back to Halifax from a visit to Newcastle. A year later Peggy was dead of consumption. 'I have had a melancholy letter', wrote Dorothy, 'from Mary Hutchinson; I fear that Margaret is dead before this time, she was then attending her at Sockburn, without the least hope of her recovery from a confirmed consumption. This account has affected me very much—last year at this time we were all together and little supposed that any one of us was so near death.'

Now, at Goslar, Wordsworth wrote her epitaph. He too had had no thought of her dying.

A slumber did my spirit seal;  
I had no human fears:  
She seemed a thing that could not feel  
The touch of earthly years.

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<sup>1</sup> He writes from Halifax on 17 February.



## 54 WORDSWORTH AND COLERIDGE 1795-1834

No motion has she now, no force;  
 She neither hears nor sees,  
 Rolled round in earth's diurnal course  
 With rocks and stones and trees!

He sent the poem, as we have seen, to Coleridge, who called it a 'sublime epitaph' but did not know to whom it referred.

The thought of the dead girl moved Wordsworth to continue. About the turn of the year he sent Coleridge the two next poems. They are love poems now, not uninfluenced by Burns. She is named Lucy, perhaps from Lucy Gray, who also lived remote. In the first of the new poems Lucy lives in a remote spot 'beside the springs of Dove'. There is no evidence that the Hutchinsons ever lived there, high up in the Cleveland Hills twenty miles from Sockburn, but Wordsworth habitually does what he likes with incidents and places of 'real' life.<sup>1</sup> He was a dedicated and professional poet. His business was to create. So, in the second poem, the incident of the moon dropping suddenly behind the cottage roof and seeming a symbol of disaster may have really happened but not in connexion with Peggy.<sup>2</sup> Yet the last stanza, omitted in the final

<sup>1</sup> *E.g.* he moves Simon Lee from Somerset to Cardigan, and he changes Dorothy to Emmeline. If possible, he keeps a metrical equivalence.

<sup>2</sup> Such transference of incident is found in the Glow-worm poem 'Among all lovely things my love had been', where the incident (six and a half years old) had concerned Dorothy. The name in the original version is Emma, i.e. Emmeline, i.e. Dorothy. Wordsworth wrote the poem in an emotional state connected with Mary—on 12 April 1802 on his way home after seeing her about their marriage. Later he substituted 'Lucy' for 'Emma'.

revision, suggests that it did happen in connexion with Peggy.

I told her this; her laughter light  
Is ringing in my ears;  
And when I think upon that night  
My eyes are dim with tears.

In the first of these two poems, which has five stanzas instead of the published three, Lucy dies not of a galloping consumption but of a 'slow distemper' and for a 'Long time' was as good as dead. Naïvely and revealingly Wordsworth told Coleridge that the words 'Long time' were to be considered 'as put in merely to fill up the measure but as injurious to the sense'.

The last Lucy poem proper is contained in a joint letter of William and Dorothy to Mary Hutchinson. Without any comment except 'I now transcribe a short poem to be read after "She dwelt among",' William begins what is a scarcely veiled declaration of love to Mary. The eight months in Germany had made him realize his love for England: but there is a deeper stratum than that in the poem. Once he had quitted England and found a foreign love (physically he had been three or four times abroad): that experience, also, confirms him in his love of home.

I travell'd among unknown men,  
In lands beyond the sea;  
Nor, England, did I know till then  
What love I bore to thee.

'Tis past, that melancholy dream!  
Nor will I quit thy shore  
A second time; for still I seem  
To love thee more and more.



Not only the long German winter but even France and Annette had become a melancholy dream, Mary was beloved not only for herself but as part of England, not only for herself but as inheriting also Wordsworth's unfulfilled love for her dead sister. It was just five years ago. Mary, even if she had not been told, could not have failed to take the allusion.

'Among thy mountains did I feel  
The gladness of desire;  
And she I cherish'd turn'd her wheel  
Beside an English fire.

'Thy mornings showed, thy nights concealed,  
The bowers where Lucy play'd;  
And thine is too the last green field  
Which Lucy's eyes survey'd.

God for ever bless thee, my dear Mary—Adieu.'

There is one more mention of Peggy. In August 1808, when Sarah Hutchinson's health was causing alarm, Dorothy wrote: 'It was so with poor Peggy Hutchinson.'<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> I think it unlikely that, at or before the time of Peggy's death, Wordsworth was 'in love' with either her or Mary. He was, no doubt, very fond of them both. The shock of Peggy's death brought that fondness home to him, just as his later love for Mary brought home to him his earlier fondness for *her*. There are three youthful poems in which a Mary figures. The earliest, *Beauty and Moonlight*, is just a boy's verses: it is the original of *Lewti*. The second is *A Ballad*, dated March 1787, in which Mary dies in spite of William giving her a glove to warm her hand! The third, *Septimi Gades*, is an adaptation of an ode of Horace. Mary is invited to seek 'a humble shed' by a tributary of the Rhone known to the poet, or, failing that, in 'Grasmere's quiet vale'. This must be later than the 1790 vacation tour and may date from

There is a longing in these poems which cannot be unnoticed. Wordsworth had got Annette out of his system. There is hardly a trace<sup>1</sup> of her at Alfoxden. She is not Ruth. Indeed she has, in any case, been identified by biographers too freely with Wordsworth's deserted women. He was interested in them before he knew her. The earliest is in *An Evening Walk*. They were a legacy of the American War. Yet in Germany could Wordsworth help thinking of France? 'I acquired more french in two months, than I should acquire German in five years living as we have lived', he wrote to Coleridge. The Lucy poems are a final rejection of Annette. They also go back behind *Tintern Abbey*. There is no 'something far more deeply interfused' in 'A slumber did my spirit seal'. The second stanza is entirely pagan.

If Annette was rejected, something was desired. At the beginning of the German visit, Wordsworth was still hoping to go back to Somerset, but, as time went on, his thoughts turned to his native north. Coleridge, knowing this, was torn between Stowey and Tom Poole on the one hand and a future with Wordsworth on the other. The Wordsworths eventually spent the summer and autumn of 1799 with the Hutchinsons at Sockburn. The correspondence which led up to this has not survived. Mary Hutchinson, as Dorothy's friend, had spent about three months at Racedown in 1797.

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1794—but in that case 'Mary' may be Annette, if the poem is more than an exercise. See, however, de Selincourt, *Wordsworthian and other Studies* (1947), pp. 21-5.

<sup>1</sup> Perhaps 'My child! they gave thee to another' in *The Complaint*.



William had taken the opportunity to go away for a fortnight with Montagu, little Basil's father, but he was very cheerful during Mary's visit. Though Annette had bowled him over, his reactions were usually slow ('from hiding-places ten years deep'), and it is possible that, though not Mary but her sister is Lucy, yet Mary brings 'something of angelic light' to the atmosphere of the poems.

. . . . .

With 'Three years she grew in sun and shower' on his lips Wordsworth and his sister walked through the pines, having consigned their baggage to the diligence. In four days they arrived at Nordhausen, about forty miles south of Goslar, having taken to the post-wagon for the last ten miles because of the rain. For two months they rambled about, twice visiting Göttingen where Coleridge had arrived early in February, but they had no Wedgwood annuity and could spend, at the most, a pound a week each. As from France, so from Germany Wordsworth returned because of his poverty. By 13 May he was at Sockburn and writing to find out about the proceeds of *Lyrical Ballads*.

The Wordsworths were a loving pair and had each other. Coleridge, for all the gaiety of Ratzeburg and the learning of Göttingen, missed their presence, and he missed his wife and babies (the younger died during his absence), and he found no one to love among the Germans. Yet, though his affections were athirst, his stay in Germany was, next to the Alfoxden year, probably the most satisfactory period of his life. His

health was not at all bad. We hear of a styne at Ratzeburg and of opium, which he took for pain, at Göttingen, but he was in full vigour for walking and working. He wrote little poetry. There are the well-known hexameters to

William my teacher, my friend ! dear William and  
dear Dorothea !,

there are some homesick poems and a few translations or imitations, but nothing stands out. He was too busy taking in. And he was sometimes living *The Ancient Mariner*. As the packet-boat made out to sea from Yarmouth, he thought of the 'kirks' in his disappearing native land. More notably he saw, as in his own poem, the ice on the frozen lake of Ratzeburg in January:

. . . between these two Walls of mist the sunlight *burnt* upon the ice, forming a road of golden fire, intolerably bright ! and the mist-walls themselves partook of the blaze in a multitude of shining colours. This is our second Frost. About a month ago, before the Thaw came on, there was a storm of wind ; during the whole night, such were the thunders and howlings of the breaking ice, that they have left a conviction on my mind, that there are Sounds more sublime than any Sight *can* be, more absolutely suspending the power of comparison and more utterly absorbing the mind's self-consciousness in its total attention to the object working upon it. Part of the ice, which the vehemence of the wind had shattered, was driven shore-ward and froze anew. On the evening of the next day, at sun-set, the shattered ice thus frozen, appeared of a deep blue, and in shape like an agitated sea ; beyond this, the water, that ran up between the great Islands of ice which had preserved their masses entire



and smooth, shone of a yellow green<sup>1</sup>; but all these scattered Ice-islands, themselves, were of an intensely bright blood colour—they seemed blood and light in union!

In *The Ancient Mariner* he had written—

Listen, Stranger! Mist and Snow,  
And it grew wond'rous cauld:  
And Ice mast-high came floating by  
As green as Emerald.

And thro' the drifts the snowy clifts  
Did send a dismal sheen;  
Ne shapes of men ne beasts we ken—  
The Ice was all between.

The Ice was here, the Ice was there,  
The Ice was all around:  
It crack'd and growl'd, and roar'd and howl'd—  
Like noises of a swound.

The poet's finest creation is finer than his normal self. It raises that self, but he is still conscious of having to live up to it, it may be morally, it may be spiritually, it may be æsthetically. Coleridge's travel books gave him the antarctic scenery, his mind transfused it into poetry, and his own poetry helped him to see and hear more than anyone else at Ratzeburg saw and heard that winter.

He left Ratzeburg and its 'high life, among barons, counts and countesses' (Dorothy sounds not unjustifiably envious) on 6 February, passed through Hanover,

<sup>1</sup> Cf. 'its peculiar tint of yellow green' in the *Dejection* Ode.

and in a few days was at Göttingen. The University there had been founded in 1737 by George II, Elector of Hanover. It was the German centre for studying English institutions and literature. It was naturally the German university most favoured by the Elector's British subjects. Some fun was made of it.

Whene'er with haggard eyes I view  
This dungeon that I'm rotting in,  
I think of those companions true  
Who studied with me at the U-  
niversity of Gottingen,  
niversity of Gottingen.

So wrote Canning in the *Anti-Jacobin*. Coleridge found several fellow-countrymen there. He attended one hard-drinking night which reminded him of Cambridge, but Göttingen could give him what Cambridge could not. It was a live centre of learning. In his few months there Coleridge, for the first time since leaving Christ's Hospital, received satisfying formal instruction. His four months at Ratzeburg, meeting all sorts of people, talking and listening, had given him the German language, though he says his pronunciation was bad. He could, therefore, profit fully from the lectures at Göttingen and from his conversations with the Professors. He worked hard, reading and making digests. He studied philology, including Old German, 'Theotuscan' and Oriental languages; he studied natural science and philosophy and literature. He could absorb very quickly. A few years of it would have made him the most learned man in the world. He ought to have been born at the



beginning of the twentieth century. He would have become an outstanding professor of philosophy, fully conversant with many other studies, recognized as a leader of thought, both speculative and analytical—and, of course, known as a great 'character' of whom many stories were told. He would have had an adequate and regular income. Modern medicine would have taken care of his ailments, of which there is more to be said later, and would have provided him, if necessary, with anodynes which are not habit-forming. The need to canalize some of his findings into regular lectures would have done no harm. Whether with a more regular life he would have been even as great a poet as he was is doubtful, but he would have written some memorable poems before he was thirty.

He found it hard to tear himself away from Göttingen and come home. The ten months' absence did no good to the not too hardy plant of his married life. He kept on postponing the return of himself and Chester and, therefore, did not write to Wordsworth who was worried by the lack of news—a foretaste of much worse future worries of the same sort. He came back in July, having missed on the way a £30 box of books which included Kant, but it turned up. This was the most effective importation into England of the latest German philosophy.

For all his home-sickness and his posting straight through to Stowey, England must have seemed very flat after his German experiences. 'Nor will I quit thy shore A second time' cannot have summarized his feeling as it did Wordsworth's. Daniel Stuart of the

*Morning Post* may have needed some appeasing, for Coleridge had entirely neglected his obligations to that paper. Nor had he, as he had so exuberantly hoped, brought back a great work, or the materials for a great work, on Lessing which would bring him fame and fortune. He had overspent his annuity, he had left his wife to borrow from Tom Poole or her brother-in-law Southey, his little Berkeley was dead, Wordsworth was not coming back to Somerset. He had learned so much—yet there was nothing exactly to show for it except ‘thirty pounds’ worth of books, chiefly metaphysics, and with a view to the one work, to which I hope to dedicate in silence the prime of my life’.



## Chapter Four

### NORTHWARD HO!

‘Coleridge has left us on a visit to his god  
Wordsworth’

ALMOST exactly a year elapsed between Coleridge's return from Germany and his settling in at Greta Hall, Keswick, on 24 July 1800. For the first four months after that return his headquarters were still at the Stowey cottage though he was little there. He patched up an old quarrel with Southey and went with him on a tour to Ottery and other parts of Devon, he made young Humphry Davy's acquaintance in Bristol and before October was out he went north to Sockburn to visit Wordsworth. A walking tour to the Lakes followed. About the end of November he took rooms at 21 Buckingham Street, Strand, and sent for his wife to join him in London. He was in London till April 1800, writing for the *Morning Post* and working at his translation of Schiller's *Wallenstein*. In April he was off to Grasmere, ‘on a visit to his god Wordsworth’ said Lamb, and then he went back to Bristol and hunted in vain for another house in Somerset. He had already, however, found that Greta Hall was available, the Wordsworths negotiated about it for him, and in June the Coleridges set out. After a week with an old friend at Liverpool they arrived on

29 June<sup>1</sup> at Grasmere, where Coleridge had an attack of rheumatic fever, and after a stay of three and a half weeks they went into their new house.

Wordsworth's movements during the twelve months were less complicated. He was at or based on Sockburn for over seven months. His first business was to find out how *Lyrical Ballads* had been received and how its finances stood. He was still thinking of a possible return to Somerset and was still, in October, being urged to return by Coleridge. The walking tour to the Lakes settled it otherwise. A cottage was found just outside Grasmere. It was called Town-end, and had once been a roadside alehouse, the Dove and Olive Branch. It is now called Dove Cottage. On 17 December the Wordsworths set out from Sockburn and on 20 December they took possession of their first unfurnished house. When the Coleridges came to Greta Hall it made a curious contrast to the Somerset year. In Somerset the Coleridges were in 'the old hovel' with their own furniture, three miles away were the Wordsworths in the quite grand furnished Alfoxden House. Now the Wordsworths were in a little cottage in Westmorland they had to furnish themselves, while thirteen miles away in Cumberland was the comparative grandeur of Greta Hall, furnished by the owner who lived next door and refused to take any rent for the first six months.

<sup>1</sup> It is quite noticeable how often Wordsworth or Coleridge began or ended a journey or visit or residence on a Sunday. Even the Wordsworths' arrival at Racedown just hit it: they turned up there at midnight on Saturday, 26 September 1795. Coleridge was married on a Sunday, 4 October 1795.



Coleridge's visit to Sockburn in the previous autumn and the walking tour are very important. They provided the first meeting of the two poets since April and the first period of prolonged companionship for more than a year. Dorothy did not go on the tour. The poets set out on Sunday, 27 October. Cottle, who was also visiting at Sockburn, accompanied them till the Tuesday, when they diverged south to Greta Bridge in order that he might take the coach for Bristol while they themselves coached north-west nearly to Penrith. They picked up John Wordsworth, the sailor brother, and for eighteen days, from 31 October to 18 November, they walked and talked and looked. Not even Wordsworth's fortnight across France in 1790 surpasses these eighteen days as a mere physical achievement. They criss-crossed the Lake District in almost every direction. Of the larger lakes only Coniston may not have been seen at all. Lakes and tarns, pikes and dales, fells and forces and prehistoric remains burst in endless succession on Coleridge's sight. 'The rapt one with the godlike forehead' understood and felt the pull of Wordsworth's boyhood experience. At Helvellyn on 5 November John had to leave them. On 18 November they finished up at Eusemere at the north end of Ullswater at the house of Clarkson, the abolitionist. Coleridge returned to Sockburn and thence to London to take up the *Morning Post* appointment by which he would earn enough in a few months to put his finances right. Wordsworth went back to Grasmere to arrange the renting of Town-end. This tour had decided him. The cottage was available. Coleridge was going to be in

London, not Somerset. Coleridge had been delighted with Cumberland and might very well join him there, as Wordsworth had joined Coleridge in Somerset in 1797.

For one thing was certain: the two were necessary to one another. From May to October Wordsworth had, as far as we know for certain, written next to nothing—perhaps a few passages had been added to the poem on his childhood (now *The Prelude* I and II).<sup>1</sup> The Somerset impetus had exhausted itself in Germany. The German winter had provided an opportunity, indeed a necessity, but no new mental stores. The walks in the spring had to some extent redeemed the winter. Wordsworth was able to tell Cottle 'we have spent our time pleasantly enough in Germany', but it is quite certain that in that country he found neither new friendship nor the 'gleam', 'the light that never was on sea or land'. For that reason and because he had produced so much in the last fifteen months and because he was having worries about the reception and the finances of that anonymous volume, *Lyrical Ballads*, the poet in him lay fallow at Sockburn. Mary Hutchinson, sweet, silent, lovable, comfortable, capable Mary, did not inspire Wordsworth to much great poetry. In any case a poet needs to lie fallow from time to time, but how he fears that lying fallow may mean becoming sterile! So, among these good and indeed exceptional women, Dorothy and the three surviving Hutchinson girls, and their excellent brothers,

<sup>1</sup> There was much making of fair copies: see Miss Darbishire, *The Poet Wordsworth*, p. 92.



Wordsworth hungered for Coleridge. Coleridge's vast range of mind, his enthusiasm, his gaiety, his unselfish eagerness that his friends should make the best of their powers were elements of a personality which enlarged the life of anyone he met whose life was capable of enlargement. His friend Tom Poole hated his departure next year from Somerset. Coleridge's presence there contributed 'greatly to my happiness and wellbeing . . . your society here is that sort of acquisition which nothing can replace'. When early in 1800 he spent some time in Lamb's London lodgings, Lamb, who had for two years been partially estranged from him, wrote 'I am living in a continual feast. Coleridge has been with me now for nigh three weeks, and the more I see of him in the quotidian undress and relaxation of his mind, the more cause I see to love him.' If Poole and Lamb felt that, how much more Wordsworth, whose 'comprehensive soul' was a seed ground for all Coleridge had to say. The new period of poetic activity which began for Wordsworth with the new year did not owe everything to Coleridge, but it did owe much to these vivifying three weeks with him.

Coleridge needed Wordsworth quite as much. Wordsworth was his best listener, he had a reciprocating mind, he had a reciprocating affection. Coleridge needed to love and be loved. He was avid for stimulus of every kind—it was his weakness capable of being transmuted into achievement. He had in a large measure opened Wordsworth's mind: Wordsworth had in a large measure opened Coleridge's eyes. Now, on the walking tour, he feasted them. Coleridge had

written no great poetry since April of the year before. Now he wrote one of his outstanding poems, not, except for the sixth stanza, of the perfection of greatness, but good enough. The sixth stanza ran

All thoughts, all passions, all delights,  
Whatever stirs this mortal frame,  
All are but ministers of Love,  
And feed his sacred flame.

This *Introduction to the Tale of the Dark Ladie* was published in the *Morning Post* on 21 December 1799. Later the sixth stanza became the first and the poem was called *Love*.

There was a worm in this bud. The scene of the poem is Sockburn. 'My own dear Genevieve' is Sarah Hutchinson, Mary's sister. Some 'young love-liking' was the most that went on, even furtively, in those few days Coleridge spent unchaperoned at Sockburn on his way to London. There was no one to make the identification with Genevieve, and there is fantasy in the poem as well as the probable fact of the telling of the story of Knight and Lady. Coleridge was certainly no harper. But he had found a better Sarah. It was to cause much future embarrassment to the Wordsworths. It did not help with his marriage, never altogether well-omened, flawed by the long absence in Germany and now suffering from an uncertainty about where to live. Mrs. Coleridge, Sarah Fricker of Bristol, wanted company, and the company she knew best was in Somerset. Coleridge was being pulled northward by the magnet of Wordsworth. Something, whether Coleridge realized it or not, was now added to the



strength of that pull by Wordsworth's friends and especially by 'my own dear Genevieve'.

Coleridge, not without some kicking against the pricks, worked hard all that winter. He must have got his money affairs more or less straight. He showed a remarkable talent for journalism. He was a brilliant leader-writer and writer-up, after the unabashed fashion of those days, of parliamentary speeches. He could write a better speech than Pitt could make, yet with no falsification of Pitt's argument. He soon hated it. Poole disapproved: this was not what Coleridge was meant for: yet when Coleridge showed signs of breaking his engagement, Poole, the honest business man, disapproved again. Admirable Poole! If only he could have been a stimulus as well as a steadying influence and a firm believer! He was the most unselfish and fatherly of all Coleridge's friends. We do not find Wordsworth showing quite the same wholly unselfish concern as Poole that Coleridge should make the best of his genius.

Coleridge kept to his plan of five months in London. Then he went to see Wordsworth again. He found the two very happy at Town-end though the winter had been severe and solitary. The poet was completing Part I, Book I of *The Recluse*, first published in full in 1888, though the last hundred and seven lines (written in their first form in 1798) appeared in 1814 prefixed to *The Excursion*. Whether or not that last passage was partly rewritten after Coleridge's arrival, it breathes the full Wordsworth as completed by the mind of Coleridge. Not the fantasies of demonic

religion or even of poets as great as Milton suffice for theme or inspiration, but 'the Mind of Man—My haunt, and the main region of my song'. Like that other devotee of Milton, William Blake, Wordsworth found he had to go beyond and correct Milton. Unlike Blake he did not aim at the complete subordination of the Natural Man to the Spiritual Man. That was eventually to take the soul out of his poetry, just as Coleridge was to run largely to waste for neglect of Blake's 'wirey bounding line'.

At present the glory and the freshness were renewed, perhaps as never before. The wedding of Man and this goodly Universe were celebrated in words that Coleridge was to remember in dejection only two years later. The 'something far more deeply interfused' is seen to be (and who can doubt Coleridge's religious influence?) Someone:

Come thou prophetic Spirit, Soul of Man  
Thou human Soul of the wide earth, that hast  
Thy metropolitan Temple in the hearts  
Of mighty Poets . . .

. . . then great God  
Thou who art breath and being, way and guide  
And power, and understanding, may my life  
Express the image of a better time,  
More wise desires, and simpler manners, nurse  
My heart in genuine freedom, all pure thoughts  
Be with me and uphold me to the end! <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This is the text of MS. 2 (early months of 1800): see de Selincourt and Darbishire, V, 5, 6, 339 and 372. It is intermediate between the original 1798 version and that published in 1814 as the 'Prospectus' to the *Excursion*.



This was better than *Wallenstein* which Coleridge had brought with him to finish off. He had had five months of hard work—hard work with the pen, for in the student's sense Coleridge was always hard at work. Such a reader and such a rememberer and orderer of what he read was perhaps never known. He could have polished off in a few months the full course for an Honour School in a twentieth-century university, though he would have found it terribly difficult to keep to the prescribed track. All this vast and increasing store not of knowledge only but of wisdom was at Wordsworth's disposal. At Coleridge's disposal was the delighted company of one he knew to be the greatest English poet since Milton, one who accepted his admiration and returned his love. When, in July, they were once more living within walking distance a whole series of wonderful years must have seemed to stretch ahead. Man proposes.)

What at this moment were Coleridge's literary plans? How did he expect to be helped in them by Wordsworth's presence? How did he expect his own presence to help the literary plans of Wordsworth to whom he always professed himself an inferior? These, if one remembers the ardent affection binding together the two men, may seem cold-blooded questions, but an answer must be attempted.

Coleridge's main aim from his return from Germany onwards was to collect material for, to clear his mind about, and ultimately to write a Magnum Opus, 'my Great Work', 'the one work to which I hope to dedicate . . . the prime of my life'. It was to contain his

arguments and conclusions on the nature of the universe, particularly the mental and spiritual universe: Mind, including the Mind of Man, was the haunt and main region of his thought: metaphysics, theology and psychology would all play their parts in the Great Work, the philosophical treatise in which the river of his own profound meditation would carry with it all that was true in the philosophies of the ancient world, of England and of Germany. Coleridge was only twenty-six, but the work was, ultimately, not beyond his power of achievement. Undue haste would mar it. If his patrons or others looked for early results in the way of publication, they would be hindering it. Ill-health or bread-and-butter jobs would hinder it. In the event they did so: he left a mass of material in notebooks and other manuscripts, he published bits here and there, his talk found its way into the stream of English thought both directly and through Wordsworth's poetry, but the Great Work was not produced. Coleridge, from his Cambridge days onward, accused himself of sloth, just as Hamlet accused himself of cowardice. Coleridge's mind was not indolent: he had not even Wordsworth's 'wise passiveness'. The intense and continuous activity of his mind pushed him on and on beyond point after point at which a lesser man would have stopped, sure that he had now got it all settled and could write the definitive book. In any case, whatever one may accept about Coleridge's defects, they were largely the defects of his virtues. Coleridge was and did so much that it becomes tedious to listen to the complaints, which he was compelled himself to



echo, that he did no more. Further it must not be forgotten that he had to work with what went much slower than his thought—bundles of sometimes badly cut quill pens, ‘such execrable blurrers of innocent white paper’. If instead he had had such modern conveniences as the expert stenographer or the dictaphone, there might, for good or ill, have been almost no limit to the number of his published volumes: ‘he often’, recorded Cottle, ‘poured forth as much as half an octavo volume in a single evening, and that in language sufficiently pure and connected to admit of publication’. For good or ill: since, if the great work had been written, fully methodized, it would conceivably have been of less seminal value than what Coleridge actually did, for who can loose the bands of Orion? ‘Can it be’, as Keats was to ask, ‘that even the greatest Philosopher ever arrived at his Goal without putting aside numerous objections?’

Coleridge was a philosopher but he was also a poet. The poet in him was liable at times to accuse the philosopher of stifling it. He could think about metaphysics when in pain and unable to poetize. When he was well, his eagerness for poetry or at least poetic experience would at times curb the philosopher.

Coleridge was a philosopher, Wordsworth in essence was not. Yet Coleridge clearly hoped that his nearness to Wordsworth would help his own Great Work. Wordsworth, he wrote to Poole on 6 May 1799 from Göttingen, ‘is a *good* and *kind* man, and the only one whom in *all* things I feel my superior—and you will believe me when I say that I have few feelings more

pleasurable than to find myself, in intellectual faculties, an inferior'. It is obvious that he found discussion with Wordsworth intellectually profitable. He must have been aware that he gave good measure in return, and he wanted Wordsworth to write a full-length philosophical poem. He believed Wordsworth could do this. He had been the first to perceive, was still the only one who fully realized, Wordsworth's greatness: by his help and encouragement the new Milton in a new age in a new way would justify the ways of God to Man.

Nothing so great as that was achieved in the second half of the year 1800, but it was a delightful period of renewed intimacy and of poetry. It was also a busy time, especially for Wordsworth, over a new edition of *Lyrical Ballads*. The 1798 volume, in spite of some unfavourable criticisms, had aroused a fair amount of interest and its five hundred copies were exhausted. In the new edition there was to be a second volume of about the same size and the 'Advertisement' was to be replaced by a much longer Preface. This Preface,<sup>1</sup> though written by Wordsworth, should be treated as a joint production of himself and Coleridge. 'Our opinions on the subject of poetry do almost entirely coincide' is the conclusion of the paragraph stating that five of the poems were furnished by 'a Friend'. The new edition was decided on before Coleridge settled in at Keswick, the printing was to be done by the same Bristol printer, Biggs, and Coleridge had

<sup>1</sup> Care should be taken at this stage to make sure that the reprint used is of the 1800, not the modified 1802-5, version.



arranged that, since neither he nor Wordsworth could be there, Humphry Davy should overlook the printing on the spot. So on 29 July<sup>1</sup> Wordsworth wrote to Davy whom he had not yet met, enclosing a first instalment of copy and asking him to correct 'anything you find amiss in the punctuation a business at which I am ashamed to say I am no adept'. He went on to explain that the rest of the copy for the new second volume would be sent to him by regular instalments thrice weekly and that the Preface, to go of course into the first volume, would 'be sent in a few days'.

Coleridge was not the only procrastinator. Indeed, if one thinks of this second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* from the printer's point of view, it must have been pretty maddening. Wordsworth, as we know from Dorothy's *Journal*, was still working at 'the sheepfold' (i.e. *Michael*, the last poem in the volume) on 11 November and it was not sent off before mid-December. He corresponded with Biggs direct. *Christabel* was sent and later cancelled. The Preface, instead of being sent in a few days, was being written on 13 September and was sent off soon after. In October the paragraphs about Coleridge's contributions were altered, that about *Christabel* being withdrawn, but the other paragraph was altered again on 23 December. The last instalment of copy was off before 15 December, but on 24 December correspondence about proofs was still going on. Yet somehow Biggs and the publisher, Longman of London, did so well that on 14 January 1801 Wordsworth was able to write a long letter to

<sup>1</sup> Misdated 28 July.

the Whig leader, Charles James Fox, requesting his 'acceptance of these volumes'.

The Preface expressed the joint opinions of the two poets, at this time, about English poetry. They were at one another's houses, often for days at a time. Wordsworth did the actual writing, and any slight difference in the opinions which 'do almost entirely coincide' he doubtless decided in his own favour. There were differences and they grew. The prose, too, is Wordsworth's prose, not Coleridge's. Wordsworth was an absorber not an echo. Some sentences are repeated from the 1798 Advertisement, some are amplified to meet past criticism. It is a controversial document. At times it is half bogged in the argument of the moment: poetic diction is all wrong but there is an unpoetic diction to be avoided. Each poem has 'a worthy *purpose*', but, having stressed that, the authors are unable to say anything satisfactory about metre. 'Why professing these opinions have I written in verse?' asks Wordsworth, and he goes on most unsatisfactorily about endeavouring 'to superadd the charm which by the consent of all nations is acknowledged to exist in metrical language'. Yet he, or perhaps Coleridge, gets down to fundamentals when he writes that 'all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings; but though this be true, Poems to which any value can be attached were never produced on any variety of subjects but by a man who being possessed of more than usual organic sensibility had also thought long and deeply'. Wordsworth and Coleridge, like other poets writing about the nature of poetry and



poets, tend to write about the nature of their own poetry and themselves as poets, but this generalization in the Preface is fundamentally sound and of fundamental importance. A man's poetry taps what is deepest in him, hence the 'spontaneous overflow': if what is deepest in him is of any imaginative value, it springs from and brings with it a fusion of feeling and thought.

Coleridge said in 1818 that he had flowed<sup>1</sup> with a hundred nameless rills into other men's main stream. He meant Wordsworth's: into it, in fact, he flowed in vast and steady streams. Without Coleridge Wordsworth would have had no philosophy worthy the name. As Dorothy opened the eye of his imagination to the small and tender, so Coleridge provided that imagination with structure and order. Coleridge had complete spiritual and intellectual unselfishness. Everyone who knows anything about him knows of the early 'pantisocracy', all-equal-government, but less stress has been laid on its accompanying 'aspheterism', non-appropriation. The colonists on the banks of the Susquehannah were to have the products of their labour in common. This ideal of the early Christians has always come up against the hard fact called by theologians the Fall, but it inevitably recurred to ardent youths who were fired by the French Revolution and believed in human perfectibility. Southey, with whom pantisocracy and aspheterism, though not the words, originated, soon tired of them: when he shared lodgings in Bristol with Coleridge, he earned three times as much and had

<sup>1</sup> Cf. the passage at the end of *Biographia Literaria*, chapter x.

thus to pay three-fourths of their joint expenses. On the material side Coleridge would always be the gainer by aspheterism, but it is only just to remember that he practised it throughout life on the intellectual side: he was none of your scholars who hoard an idea or a discovery for fear someone else should steal the credit. The new metrical movement of *Christabel* flowered in Scott's *Lays* many years before *Christabel* was published. So now Coleridge not only gave his ideas to Wordsworth's Preface but five of his poems to Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads*, for the new edition was 'By W. Wordsworth'. The 1798 edition had been anonymous; 'Wordsworth's name is nothing to a large number of persons; mine stinks', Coleridge had written to Cottle. Yet Wordsworth, who by the end of 1799 was becoming shrewder in business matters than when he dealt with the Calvert legacy, realized then that the name of Coleridge the successful journalist would do no harm. 'Take no pains', he wrote on Christmas Eve from Grasmere to Coleridge in London, 'to contradict the story that the L.B. are entirely yours. Such a rumour is the best thing that can befall them.' He was right, and in June he was able to report the first edition 'sold off, and another is called for by the Booksellers'.

There was no point in making the second edition anonymous. Once *Christabel* was out of it all the new poems except *Love* were Wordsworth's: the whole of the second volume was his. Into it went most of the German harvest and the shorter poems of the first Grasmere year, including *The Brothers*, *Hart-Leap*



*Well* and *Michael*, the longest poem, given the place of honour at the end like *Tintern Abbey* in the first volume. Wordsworth had come home. No one in Westmorland would mistake him for a French spy.

Wordsworth did not publish for immediate fame. He was a professional poet of great ambition and, now, of great confidence. He wrote with a view to permanence. Immediate publication would fight the battle of purifying taste, but its real stimulus was need of money. That was the reason for the 1793 and the 1798 publications, and he was still as poor as ever. The first requirement was to produce volumes which would sell for his benefit and Coleridge's. It is important to remember this when considering the fate of *The Ancient Mariner* and *Christabel*. The tradesmanlike view will shock only those who forget that even Wordsworth and his sister had to eat. *The Ancient Mariner* had been appreciated by no one but Lamb. It was condemned by reviewers, among them Southey with his sneer at a 'Dutch attempt at German sublimity'. Wordsworth very properly remarked that Southey 'knew that I published those poems for money and money alone. He knew that money was of importance to me. If he could not conscientiously have spoken differently of the volume, he ought to have declined the task of reviewing it.' Southey also knew who was the author of *The Ancient Mariner*, and he, who was responsible for Coleridge's marriage, had now undermined his sister-in-law's confidence even in her husband's genius: 'The Lyrical Ballads are laughed at and disliked by all with very few exceptions',

said she. Wordsworth thought at one time that it might be better to omit *The Ancient Mariner* from a second edition, but, when a second edition was actually called for, he kept it though no longer as the opening poem. Most of the archaisms were dropped, for which we may thank the critics. He added a note to it as to *The Thorn* and *Tintern Abbey*. He claimed, no doubt justly, to have insisted on keeping it against Coleridge's own preference for omission. He admitted that the poem 'has indeed great defects', and his summary of the defects shows his own failure to grasp the poem's imaginative greatness. 'Yet the Poem contains many delicate touches of passion, and indeed the passion is everywhere true to nature; a great number of the stanzas present beautiful images, and are expressed with unusual felicity of language; and the versification, though the metre is itself unfit for long poems, is harmonious and artfully varied, exhibiting the utmost powers of that metre, and every variety of which it is capable.'

Quite different is the story of *Christabel*. Settled at Keswick, Coleridge naturally took up his poetry at the point where it had stopped at Stowey. *Christabel* was to be continued. Part I was set up by the printer, and the rest would follow when written, just as Wordsworth's 'sheepfold' would. At first it would not come: it never had been the right vehicle for Coleridge's imagination. Finally, after many windy walks and much trying and trying, he drank almost too much wine one evening at the house of a clergyman and next day 'my verse-making faculties returned to me'. Part II was



written. On Saturday 4 October Coleridge walked over to Grasmere, arriving very wet, and read it to the Wordsworths. They were 'exceedingly delighted'. On Sunday morning he read it again: they had 'increasing pleasure'. One understands the pleasure. Metre and diction are hardly below Part I. The scene, in Part I Somerset though unnamed, is changed to the country of Dungeon-ghyll and Wyndermere. The truth about Geraldine begins to be apparent to the reader: she is a lamia who, unlike Keats's Lamia, imposes something of her serpent nature on her victim. The story, however it is to end, is somewhat advanced but can hardly be more than half-way through. The two Parts contain 655 lines, excluding the 22 lines eventually, in 1816, published as 'The Conclusion to Part II' but having no other connexion with *Christabel*. A rough calculation was made that the complete poem would run up to twice that length, i.e. 1,300 lines. Was it suitable for *Lyrical Ballads*? It would be about twice the length of *The Ancient Mariner*, hitherto much the longest. It would be quite unlike any other poem in the volumes. Wordsworth, wrote Coleridge to Davy, 'thought it indelicate to print two volumes with his name, in which so much of another man's was included'. Would it not be better to publish a separate volume containing the completed *Christabel* and Wordsworth's *The Pedlar*, the name now given to the enlarged *Ruined Cottage*? Within a week of the delighted reception of Part II at Grasmere *Christabel* was out of *Lyrical Ballads*. Coleridge wrote no more of it. One may blame Wordsworth for having,

with the best intentions, removed from Coleridge the only possible stimulus to its completion, but the completed *Christabel*, if it could have been completed in two more months, might well have been a fiasco. There is no real sign of imaginative life in the structure of the story. The finest lines in Part II are semi-autobiographical. There is only a little in them of the quarrel with Southey for abandoning pantisocracy. There is much of the quarrel with Lloyd and through Lloyd with Lamb, though the friendship with Lamb had now been most happily renewed. There is some sad prophecy in them of the quarrel with Wordsworth which was still ten years in the future.

Alas! they had been friends in youth;  
But whispering tongues can poison truth;  
And constancy lives in realms above;  
And life is thorny; and youth is vain;  
And to be wroth with one we love  
Doth work like madness in the brain.  
And thus it chanced, as I divine,  
With Roland and Sir Leoline.  
Each spake words of high disdain  
And insult to his heart's best brother:  
They parted—ne'er to meet again!  
But never either found another  
To free the hollow heart from paining—  
They stood aloof, the scars remaining,  
Like cliffs which had been rent asunder;  
A dreary sea now flows between;—  
But neither heat, nor frost, nor thunder,  
Shall wholly do away, I ween,  
The marks of that which once hath been.

For all his varied and continuous intellectual activity,



84 WORDSWORTH AND COLERIDGE 1795-1834

for all his concern with the philosophy of religion, Coleridge found his real happiness or misery in personal relationships. If the exchange of love was not literally all he needed, he could not long do without it. The oft-quoted lines at the end of *The Pains of Sleep* are not far from the mark:

To be beloved is all I need,  
And whom I love, I love indeed.

## Chapter Five

### THE BEGINNINGS OF DEJECTION

'I may not hope from outward forms to win  
The passion and the life, whose fountains are within'

COLERIDGE'S Great Work did not make progress during those first six months at Keswick. There was the new house to settle into. There was the birth on 14 September of his third child: that coming event had clinched the acceptance of Greta Hall, for Mrs. Coleridge had to be settled in a home by August. There were the wrestlings with *Christabel* and the discussions about the Preface. There was all the walking between Keswick and Grasmere. Thirteen miles up and over Dunmail Raise were very different from the easy three between Stowey and Alfoxden. There were many other walks and talks such as that on Wednesday 13 August when Coleridge and the Wordsworths, who were staying at Greta Hall, remade the turf seat at Windy Brow, where in 1794 Dorothy had spent the spring with William and William had spent the autumn nursing Raisley Calvert. Wordsworth produced his old *Inscription for a Seat by the Road Side halfway up a Steep Hill Facing South*, which on 21 October 1800 was published in the *Morning Post* over the pseudonym Ventifrons, i.e. Windy Brow. This was not the first time Wordsworth



had helped Coleridge to fulfil his contract with that newspaper.<sup>1</sup>

It was a fine August followed by a fine September. Coleridge was well, but the Lake climate was not to suit him. With the winter illness returned. Coleridge's health became for the first time a matter of permanent concern. His rheumatism has been traced to early childhood when, after a quarrel with a brother, he ran out of the house into the misty October fields where he fell asleep and was not discovered till the morning. 'I was weakly and subject to the ague for many years after', he told Poole. At Christ's Hospital the food did not always suit him and there was never enough except on Wednesdays. He was afflicted on one occasion with the 'itch' and sulphur ointment treatment. In his teens he swam the New River in his clothes and kept them on: the result was a long spell in the sick-ward with jaundice and rheumatic fever. In his first term at Cambridge he had rheumatism attributed to the dampness and draughtiness of his rooms. In Michaelmas term 1792 also he was unwell, but we hear of little more till March 1796. Then the maddening blunders of the printer while his poems were in the press, worry over his wife's illness and expected miscarriage, and perhaps work on *The Watchman*, stopped his sleeping—'I have been obliged to take Laudanum almost every night.' He recovered and was well till November. On the 19th of that month he wrote his famous self-

<sup>1</sup> See J. W. Smyser, *Coleridge's Use of Wordsworth's Juvenilia*, Publications of the Modern Language Association of America, June 1950.

description to Thelwall in which 'I cannot breathe through my nose' is the only remark of obvious medical interest, but a fortnight earlier, in the midst of his worries about finding a home, he had written to Poole during a violent attack of neuritis.

On Wednesday night [*i.e.* 2 November] I was seized with an intolerable pain from my right temple to the tip of my right shoulder, including my right eye, cheek, jaw, and that side of the throat. . . . It continued from one in the morning till half-past five and left me pale and fainty. It came on fitfully but not so violently several times on Thursday, and began severe threats towards night, but I took between sixty and seventy drops of laudanum and sopped the Cerberus just as his mouth began to open. On Friday it only *niggled* . . . but *this morning* he returned in full force, and his name is Legion! Giant-fiend of an hundred hands! With a shower of arrowy death-pangs he transpierced me, and then became a Wolf, and lay gnawing my bones. . . . I have suffered this day more bodily pain than I had before a conception of. My right cheek has certainly been placed with admirable exactness under the focus of some invisible burning-glass. . . . My medical attendant decides it to be altogether nervous, and that it originates either in severe application, or excessive anxiety. My beloved Poole, in excessive anxiety I believe it might originate. I have a blister under my right ear, and I take twenty-five drops of laudanum every five hours, the ease and *spirits* gained by which have enabled me to write you this flighty but not exaggerated account.

In December, when writing to Poole about his arrangements for coming into the Stowey cottage, he can only report

I am very poorly, not to say ill. My face monstrously swollen; my recondite eye sits quaintly behind the flesh-



hill, and looks as little as a tom-tit's. And I have a sore throat that prevents me eating ought but spoon-meat without great pain. And I have a rheumatic complaint in the back part of my head and shoulders.

He got better at Stowey, and Poole probably believed that the cause had been mental. We hear of an attack of 'depression too dreadful to be described' at Stowey in March 1797, there were the 'dysentery' and the writhing on the ground already mentioned<sup>1</sup> in connexion with *Kubla Khan*, there was the illness in March 1798 resulting from the bad tooth and affecting eye, stomach and head, but the Stowey period as a whole was one of good health and great activity. At Ratzeburg there was the styne which half-blinded him for a time. Back at Stowey in 1799 we find both Coleridge and his wife wearing 'mercurial girdles' to prevent rheumatism. He hated the girdle. It made him sweat and that brought on an attack of the rheumatism. He was well in London and well on his first two visits to the north, but he had an attack of rheumatic fever for a fortnight at Town-end in July 1800. Two bright months followed, but on 4 October, with the completed Part II of *Christabel* in his pocket, Coleridge turned up at Town-end 'very wet'. In November he had dysentery; then 'my eyes have been inflamed to a degree that rendered reading and writing scarcely possible'. A blister behind one ear had been followed before the beginning of December by painful boils there. On 20 December Dorothy records him as 'very ill, rheumatic, feverish'. He had got wet through again.

<sup>1</sup> Page 18.

Dorothy's Journal from 22 December 1800 to 9 October 1801 has been lost, but surviving letters show that Coleridge had to spend much of the early months of 1801 in bed. His mind was very active. On 16 March he told Poole he had '*completely extricated the notions of time and space*' and was on the point of solving 'the process of life and consciousness'. This 'intense study' had prevented him from sleeping properly, and, at Wordsworth's 'fervent entreaty', he had 'intermitted the pursuit'. A week later he learnt 'that deep thinking is attainable only by a man of deep feeling, and that all truth is a species of revelation'.

Even at the end of April he was 'ill all over, back, and stomach, and limbs, and so weak that he changed colour whenever he exerted himself at all' (Dorothy to Mary Hutchinson). He needs a warm climate, 'six months at Lisbon, in the South of France, or at one of the Western Isles'.<sup>1</sup> In May William and Dorothy 'are sadly grieved for your poor eyes and the rest of your complaints', and in July William wrote to Poole to say that Coleridge was no better—'he is apparently quite well one day, and the next the fit comes on him again with as much violence as ever'. The disease was 'now manifestly the gout': it 'keeps much about his stomach, he may be carried off by it with little or no

<sup>1</sup> Lisbon was thought of because Southey had twice been there. The South of France was a premature suggestion: the Battle of Copenhagen had only just been fought (2 April) and the Treaty of Amiens was not to be signed till 25 March 1802. By the Western Isles she meant the West Indies of which they knew through relations and friends, especially James Tobin ('dear brother Jim' of *We Are Seven*) of the firm of Tobin, Pinney and Tobin.



warning'. He asked Poole if he would provide £50 to enable Coleridge to spend some time in the Azores. Poole was worried and uncertain about the right thing to do. Coleridge did not go to the Azores. Instead he went and stayed with the Hutchinsons.

We, looking back on Coleridge's medical history and knowing the climate of the Lake district, can see that he ought to have resisted the magnet of Wordsworth. We can see too, what he could not, that the move was fatal for his domestic happiness. He thought he had been rather clever about it. At Greta Hall, only just outside Keswick, he had the rural home he wanted and his wife would be near enough to the town to find friends. Mrs. Coleridge would rather have stayed at Stowey. It was in her part of England, she had lived right in the village and could have a chat at any time, she got on well with Poole. She was quite happy there with the Wordsworths. She was not jealous of Dorothy who loved Coleridge but was not in love with him. Dorothy's almost unintentional picture of herself walking behind William and Coleridge and listening to their 'dear voices' is revealingly innocent. But the Wordsworth's friend Sara Hutchinson may have been another matter. Sara visited Grasmere and Greta Hall in the winter of 1800-1 when Coleridge was so ill. She was very likely a better nurse for him than his wife. His wife, wrote Dorothy, 'is indeed a bad nurse for C., but she has several great merits. She is much, very much to be pitied, for when one party is ill-matched the other necessarily must be so too. She would have been a very good wife to many another man, but for

Coleridge! . . . She is an excellent nurse to her sucking children. . . . She is to be sure a sad fiddle faddler.'

The marriage into which Coleridge had been pushed, willingly enough in the end, was breaking down. Illness and domestic unhappiness reacted on each other. Mrs. Coleridge had insisted on the marriage, had been happy in it for three years, but since then had she not had much to put up with? Left behind for nearly a year while her husband enjoyed himself in Germany, then dragged away from the only part of England she knew, no fame, no fortune, and now a husband always ill and a female visitor whom he found sympathetic. She did not, in fact, make much of a grievance of Sara Hutchinson, nor did Coleridge's friendship with Sara have much to do with the break-up of his marriage which eventually occurred. It was Coleridge who, though holding firmly to the indissolubility of marriage and never contemplating an infidelity, came to feel that he could no longer 'domesticate with Mrs. Coleridge'. She had 'inveterate habits of puny thwarting and unintermitting dyspathy'. That was perhaps even worse than the 'ill-tempered speeches' and 'screams of passion'.

Coleridge's troubles were real enough, and no doctor did him any good. There was the common analgesic, almost as common as aspirin is to-day, laudanum. Coleridge had, like other people, taken it for years when he needed it. It helped with the pain, substituting sometimes pleasurable feelings, but he did not take it for the pleasurable feelings nor had he as



yet developed any craving for it. The more he needed it, the greater the danger that a craving would one day develop. In the end the craving came and with it many ill consequences. It did not come while he was happy at home nor for long after that happiness began to be marred. When it came, he had to fight a long and bitter battle with many defeats. He came through. He deserves all our sympathy.

Coleridge was sympathetic about the illness of others. He was terribly worried about his wife in March 1796<sup>1</sup> and was often anxious about the health of his children. Experienced as he was in rheumatism, he wrote, apparently with no thought of himself, to Davy from Keswick for advice about a poor woman's rheumatism. He had only been able to suggest she should eat plenty of mustard, having seen that recommended in an advertisement! More than once, in his bad winter of 1800-1, he expressed concern about Wordsworth's health. Dorothy records that William was ill on 5 October 1800, and on 9 October Coleridge wrote to Davy: 'I cannot speak favourably of W's health, but, indeed, he has not done common justice to Dr. Beddoes's kind prescriptions.' Wordsworth was no great believer in medicines. He knew that such attacks of illness as he had were due to overwork. He was driving himself very hard. It was not the actual composition, though that must have taken a good deal out of him. It is wrong to think that Wordsworth usually composed with pain and difficulty. The glad outpouring of *Tintern Abbey* is enough to disprove

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 31, 86.

that. The real hard work came with the revision.<sup>1</sup> Yet how necessary that often was. Compare the perfection of the three stanzas of 'She dwelt among th' untrodden ways' with the unrevised and unpruned five of the version sent to Coleridge at Ratzeburg.

Neither Wordsworth nor Coleridge wrote much poetry in 1801. With *Michael* Wordsworth's great effort for the second volume of *Lyrical Ballads* came to an end. He had had a marvellous year. Relaxation was necessary and inevitable. At the end of 1801 we find him translating Chaucer, a mere amusement. Coleridge was still obsessed by the feeling that he ought to go on with *Christabel*. All that resulted, as far as we know, is the passage of twenty-two lines now called 'The Conclusion to Part II'. They were, of course, intended for Part III or IV. They describe little Hartley ('A little child, a limber elf') and would have been fitted in somehow.

Pain and sleeplessness and domestic trouble were fatal to what is most characteristic of Coleridge's poetry, its spirit of peace, its gentleness.

The moving Moon went up the sky,  
And no where did abide:  
Softly she was going up,  
And a star or two beside. ✓

*The Eolian Harp*, part honeymoon, part pre-honeymoon, is most gentle. So is *This Lime-Tree Bower My*

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Dorothy to Coleridge, May 1801: 'Poor William! his stomach is in bad plight. We have put aside all the manuscript poems, and it is agreed between us that I am not to give them up to him even if he asks for them.'



*Prison*, written in July 1797 when the Wordsworths and Lamb were staying with him at Stowey but he could not accompany them on walks because 'dear Sara' had dropped 'a skillet of boiling milk' on his foot. Three times in the poem he calls Lamb 'gentle-hearted Charles', an epithet much disliked by Lamb whose humour was, on some occasions, not free from grittiness. In fact Coleridge was here projecting his own gentle-heartedness on Charles or at any rate loving Charles for something deep in his own nature. The gentleness gave him the same faculty of minute and loving observation as Dorothy. He too was no mean electrometer.

. . . Pale beneath the blaze  
Hung the transparent foliage; and I watch'd  
Some broad and sunny leaf, and lov'd to see  
The shadow of the leaf and stem above  
Dappling its sunshine!

Gentleness pervades *The Foster-Mother's Tale*, and *The Dungeon* ends

With other ministrations thou, O nature!  
Healest thy wandering and distempered child:  
Thou pourest on him thy soft influences,  
Thy sunny hues, fair forms, and breathing sweets,  
Thy melodies of woods, and winds, and waters,  
Till he relent, and can no more endure  
To be a jarring and a dissonant thing  
Amid this general dance and minstrelsy;  
His angry spirit healed and harmonized  
By the benignant touch of love and beauty.

That it should be noted is Coleridge's not Wordsworth's. There are so many 'Wordsworthian' passages

in Coleridge that one begins to wonder how much of 'Wordsworth' is Coleridge. One cannot tell. The two blossomed together, each a fostering sun for the other.

It is gentleness which redeems the Ancient Mariner. It is the gentleness of 'the lovely lady Christabel' from which the beauty of *Christabel* stems. Gentlest of all perhaps is *Frost at Midnight* with its uncanny prophecy of Hartley's life of wandering 'like a breeze By lakes and sandy shores, beneath the crags Of ancient mountain, and beneath the clouds'. 'Therefore all seasons shall be sweet to thee' was surely in Wordsworth's mind when five months later he made a similar prophecy for Dorothy.

. . . Therefore let the moon  
Shine on thee in thy solitary walk;  
And let the misty mountain winds be free  
To blow against thee.

*France: An Ode* is different, Shelleyan and tense, but he gets back to gentleness and 'Wordsworthianism' in the non-political part of *Fears in Solitude*.

O native Britain! O my Mother Isle!  
How shouldst thou prove aught else but dear and holy  
To me, who from thy lakes and mountain-hills,  
Thy clouds, thy quiet dales, thy rocks and seas,  
Have drunk in all my intellectual life,  
All sweet sensations, all ennobling thoughts,  
All adoration of the God in nature.

*The Nightingale* is gentle throughout with its theme that the nightingale is not melancholy and with its love of 'A most gentle Maid' and of 'My dear babe'.



Though Coleridge may not have realized it, his 'shaping spirit of Imagination' and his gentleness of heart were bound together. From their active combination poetry could spring and inner peace. His search was for health of mind as well as body. Poole, whose common sense and sympathy made him in some ways the best friend Coleridge ever had, was right in being doubtful about the Azores. In any case on 22 July 1801 Coleridge could tell Southey he had been 'unusually well these last two days' and that the address for an answer to his letter was 'Mr. George Hutchinson's, Bishop's Middleham, Rushiford, Durham'. The Hutchinsons were no longer at Sockburn: this was George's farm, eight miles from Durham, and Tom's was now at Gallow Hill, near Scarborough. Coleridge made first for the nearest, and, characteristically, was no sooner there than he was in Durham trying to borrow books from the Cathedral library and finding the authorities sticky. It was Duns Scotus he wanted. His movements were quick. He was still at Keswick on 22 July, on Saturday 25 July he was in Durham and on Friday 31 July at Scarborough, suffering from a swollen knee which was the result of walking back from Durham to Bishop's Middleham. At Scarborough he wrote six undistinguished stanzas *On Revisiting the Sea-Shore* 'after long absence, under strong medical recommendation not to bathe'. Coleridge loved bathing. In spite of the doctors 'my soul fulfilled her mission': in other words, he bathed: it probably did him good.

Which sister was at which farm is not clear. Cole-

ridge spent some time at each, had quite a good holiday in spite of the knee and was back home in about a month. Another winter at Keswick was obvious madness and on 10 November he left for London, having put it off too long. The Wordsworths looked out anxiously for news. On 24 November Dorothy notes 'bad news from poor C.—very ill', on 4 December C.'s letter 'written in good spirits', on 21 December 'He had been very ill in his bowels. We were made very unhappy.' He breakfasted on Christmas Day with Davy now settled in London, but felt too dejected to dine that day with Southey. He went on to visit Poole, leaving London by coach on Saturday 26 December at 4 a.m.—not a good hour for an invalid even if he was only twenty-nine. In January he returned to London. There survives a cheerful and affectionate letter to his wife written on 24 February. In the early spring he was back home and on Friday 19 March came to Town-end and stayed till Sunday. 'His eyes were a little swollen with the wind. I was much affected by the sight of him, he seemed half stupefied', Dorothy recorded. There was a walk on Saturday, and on Sunday 'Coleridge and William lay long in bed'. Later in the day Coleridge left for home. He would have been interested by Monday's post.

On 25 October 1801 Mary Hutchinson had come for another long visit. She also visited other friends and did not leave Penrith for home till mid-February. It is pretty clear that at the beginning of 1802 there had been little hope of her and Wordsworth marrying, that Wordsworth felt himself bound not to marry



another woman unless Annette consented. Not since Racedown is there any trace of communication with Annette. So on 23 January Dorothy and William, happy in their home, thought of 'poor Mary! we were sad to think of the contrast for her.' Very soon the prospect brightened. It looks as if Coleridge in London was the intermediary with a Frenchman who, with peace impending, had come there on some business of his own or his country's and had been asked by Annette to find out what had happened to her Wordsworth. Coleridge's 'letter somewhat damped us, it spoke with less confidence about France. Wm. wrote to him' in the *Journal* under 8 February may refer only to political matters, but that is improbable in view of the letter 'from the Frenchman in London' received at Town-end on Saturday 13 February. The very next day William took the horse and was off to Penrith in the hope of catching Mary before she left for home. He was back on Tuesday, having 'only seen Mary H. for a couple of hours between Eamont Bridge and Harts-horn Tree'. She reached Bishop's Middleham on the Monday. He must have caught her soon after she had left Penrith. Meanwhile on Monday 15 February a letter had arrived at Grasmere from Annette. A week later, on 22 February, there was another and also one from Wordsworth's nine-year-old daughter Caroline. On 24 February William wrote to Annette, Coleridge and the Frenchman. On 22 March came a letter from 'poor Annette'. On that day 'We resolved to see Annette, and that Wm. should go to Mary.' In April William went and saw Mary for a few days: he left

Dorothy on his thirtieth birthday: Mary came with him a short way on his return journey but left him in time to be home by midnight. He parted from her at 'about six o'clock' on the 12th 'a little on this side of Rushyford'. He wrote to tell Coleridge at Keswick about it. What service Coleridge had done in London can only be guessed. How long he had known about Annette we cannot tell. He was a talker not a gossip, and it may have been long after his friendship with Wordsworth was formed before a merely personal matter came naturally into the conversation.

The long and steady friendship of Mary and William had ripened into love on both sides. They did not know that Lord Lonsdale would die on 24 May and that his heir would pay the debts on his estate. They did not marry on the strength of that money. The marriage was helped on by the peace with France. Annette had to be seen after all those years. The past had to be faced. Imagination has often played over that month at Calais; it has not always done justice to the strength and uprightness of the man who made the decision to go.

Meanwhile between the making of the decision of 22 March and Wordsworth's starting eastward on 5 April two great poems had come to birth, the opening stanzas of Wordsworth's *Ode*, 'There was a time when meadow, grove, and stream', and the first form of Coleridge's *Dejection: An Ode*. Wordsworth's was begun on 27 March at Grasmere. The next day (Sunday) he and Dorothy went to Keswick for an eight-day visit ('Arrived wet to



skin'). The following Sunday, 4 April, Coleridge began *Dejection*. )

Wordsworth had hitherto written nothing called, or capable of being called, an ode. The next, *Ode to Duty*, was in 1804 and others were much later. That, even if there were no other evidence, would suffice to identify the reference in Dorothy's *Journal* under Saturday (27 March)—'A divine morning. At breakfast William wrote part of an ode.' How much he wrote at breakfast is another matter. He said definitely that two years elapsed between his writing the first four stanzas and the rest. Wordsworth, especially in later life, was no more an adept at dates than at punctuation, but there are sound reasons for accepting this interval. On 17 June 1802 'William added a little to the Ode he is writing.' The first four stanzas, not necessarily exactly as we have them, were therefore the work of about three months. The references to the month of May in Stanzas III and IV show that: not even Wordsworth, who did not believe in sacrificing poetic truth to mere fact, would have called 'a divine morning' in March 'This sweet May-morning' or said in March that 'with the heart of May Doth every Beast keep holiday'.

The *Ode* was published in the 1807 collection where it has pride of place at the end of the second volume. It had no other title. Not till its republication in 1815 was the sub-title added, 'Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood'. An understanding of the poem's imaginative source and meaning is not helped by the sub-title. It can be referred to

simply as the *Ode* without risk of confusion with other odes which have their own fuller titles.

The first two stanzas are perhaps all that was written at the breakfast-table. They are complete in themselves, though it is obvious that more was intended—an ode has more than two stanzas. The thought in each of the two stanzas is the same—beauty remains but ‘the earth’ is no longer seen, as once it was, ‘in celestial light’. Never before had Wordsworth made this complaint. His ‘thought of grief’ is relieved by the sheer beauty of giving ‘timely utterance’ to it, but, though he went on, in the third and fourth stanzas, to rejoice in the beauty and gladness of spring, the sense of loss returned. There was ‘a Tree’, there was ‘A single Field’, there were other things and places associated with those moments of imaginative illumination called in *The Prelude* ‘spots of time’: but ‘the visionary gleam’ was gone.

Every poet has vacant interlunar caves from which he emerges in renewed power and glory. The very singing of his sorrow may bring him forth. So now with Wordsworth. A phase is not a permanent eclipse, whatever the poet may fear. For three more years at least Wordsworth was to be at his best: the gleam would come and come again. When it really vanished, it left a problem to which the answer is still being sought. In the opening stanzas of the *Ode* Wordsworth expressed a fear which was to be justified. Why did he feel it? Why on a divine spring morning, when his marriage had just been made possible, should he have ‘a thought of grief’?



The coming months were to be prolific nor had the first three months of 1802 been poetically unsatisfactory. He had completed *The Pedlar*—a weary task certainly, for revision did tire and worry him, and there was a disaster to a fair copy on the last day of February. *The Pedlar*, now known as *The Wanderer*, Book I of *The Excursion*, was the final form of *The Ruined Cottage* of Racedown and Alfoxden. Dorothy stitched the sheets of the re-written fair copy on Sunday, 7 March. A third edition of *Lyrical Ballads* had been called for and was now in the press with changes which included considerable additions to *Ruth*, a revised Preface and a prose Appendix—changes in which Coleridge can have had little part. Wordsworth had also been writing sonnets, probably the sequence of four published in 1807, beginning 'I am not One who much or oft delight' and later called *Personal Talk*. Wordsworth said they were pre-marital as they obviously are. In March he had written *The Sailor's Mother*, *Alice Fell*, *Beggars*, *To a Butterfly* (that beautiful tribute to Dorothy), *To the Cuckoo* (in this very week ending on the 27th) and, on the Friday night while Dorothy 'was getting into bed', *The Rainbow*. There were others: one, written the week before, after the first letter he had ever received from his daughter Caroline but before the decisive letter of 22 March, was *The Emigrant Mother*. It is not a great poem but it has its pathos. Wordsworth is not sorrowing for Annette who had not become an emigrant (a word corresponding to the twentieth-century 'refugee'). It was he who had had to flee from France: the emigrant

father, who must often have looked at a child and thought 'my daughter is now of that age', transferred his feelings to *The Emigrant Mother*.

The condition of Coleridge, who had just returned, was a cause of disquiet in itself and, moreover, the fading of Coleridge's poetry might presage a fading of Wordsworth's. The revival in these last weeks of the Annette affair, even if it was only an affair which had once been passionate but was so no longer, was deeply disturbing. The brave resolve to see her was disturbing. No wonder 'the gleam' seemed absent. But was there an obscurer disturbance? That Wordsworth the man loved Mary and wanted to marry her is beyond doubt, but what of Wordsworth the poet? Some misgivings are not faced because they have not risen to the surface. Wordsworth was self-dedicated to poetry, it was his profession, his vocation, his justification for living, for having (as he himself said) not sacrificed himself in the French Revolution. After the tentative and recuperative years at Racedown he had, with the help of Dorothy and Coleridge, found himself. He was a poet of actual and potential achievement. Nothing in the life at Grasmere militated against it. He had no other responsibilities, cares or duties: he was nature's celibate priest. Could he, conscientious and prudent as he was, become responsible for a wife and family and yet remain wholly dedicated to his high calling? Was it that misgiving which cast a shadow over the gleam? He would remain at Grasmere. Dorothy saw to that. Only two days after the great decisions, on 24 March, 'I made a vow that we would not leave this country



for G. Hill'—Gallow Hill, Mary's home. Did Dorothy feel that Wordsworth *the poet* ought to remain celibate? It would partly account for her agitation on the day of the marriage.

However that may be, it is certain that a new and, one would think, quite unnecessary seriousness settled at once on Wordsworth.

My whole life I have liv'd in pleasant thought,  
As if life's business were a summer mood;  
As if all needful things would come unsought  
To genial faith, still rich in genial good;  
And how can He expect that others should  
Build for him, sow for him and at his call  
Love him, who for himself will take no heed at all?

So he wrote in *The Leech Gatherer*, afterwards significantly named *Resolution and Independence*, which was begun on 3 May, finished on 9 May and again finished on 4 July. On 14 June William 'wrote to Mary and Sara about the Leech Gatherer'. The gleam is not absent from that poem, but only if the eye is single can the whole body be full of light: Wordsworth was yet to find whether singleness of eye and marriage were compatible. Yet, if he had not married Mary, could he have escaped Annette?

This complicated personal problem and 'a divine morning' helped to produce the 'part of an ode' which the Wordsworths took with them to Keswick on the wet day which followed. Coleridge at first took no notice of the complaint that 'the gleam' had vanished. He felt Wordsworth's joy and consequent triumph as a poet. That and the contrast with himself, domestically as well as poetically, form the subject of most of the

poem<sup>1</sup>—it was not at first an ode—out of which was carved *Dejection: An Ode*. He called it 'A Letter To —' and dated it 'April 4, 1802. Sunday Evening'. That, like the date given to *The Eolian Harp*, was the day on which it was begun. All its 340 lines can hardly have been written in one evening. There is no need to check the date by an almanac. The phases of the moon take approximately  $29\frac{1}{2}$  days to complete. A month later, on 4 May, Dorothy noted 'the crescent moon with the auld moon in her arms' in allusion to Coleridge's poem. So it was exactly on 4 April that Coleridge, remembering Sir Patrick Spence, saw 'the New Moon' with 'the Old Moon in her lap'. On 21 April Coleridge 'repeated' to the Wordsworths 'the verses he wrote to Sara. I was affected with them, and . . . in miserable spirits.' The 'Letter' was to Sara Hutchinson. It is frank enough about the consolation he had found with her and the contrast of his own 'coarse domestic life'. There was an æolian harp in Coleridge's study at Greta Hall. It comes into the poem as it had into the Clevedon poem of six and a half years ago: he cannot have been unaware of that significance. Happiness is not for him. Happiness is for Wordsworth who is to marry Sara's sister: to that happy group Sara belongs. Yet he will make an effort

When thou, and with thee those, whom thou lov'st best,  
Shall dwell together in one happy Home,  
One House, the dear *abiding* Home of All,  
I too will crown me with a Coronal.

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<sup>1</sup> Printed in full by E. de Selincourt in *Essays and Studies*, 1936 (published 1937), and in *Wordsworthian and other Essays* (1947).



So the 'coronal' of stanza IV of Wordsworth's *Ode* was already there when Coleridge wrote this part of his poem.

Towards the end Coleridge takes up the challenge of Wordsworth's *Ode*. He too loses the gleam. Beautiful scenes give some solace.

But oft I seem to feel, and evermore I fear  
They are not to me now the Things, which once they  
were.

The difference is in ourselves.

O Sara! we receive but what we give,  
And in *our* life alone does Nature live.

Joy, Sara! is the Spirit and the Power,  
That, wedding Nature to us, gives in Dower  
A new Earth and new Heaven,  
Undreamt of by the Sensual and the Proud!

O dear! O Innocent! O full of Love!  
A very Friend! A Sister of my Choice—  
O dear, as Light and Impulse from above,  
Thus may'st thou ever, evermore rejoice!

He does not believe that Wordsworth has lost the gleam. Wordsworth has everything to make him happy and shed the gleam on Heaven and Earth. Even Coleridge's 'shaping spirit of Imagination' is only suspended by the visitations of grief. Sara will be his sister, his Dorothy. Yet, when the poem was shaped into an *Ode* for publication, it received no happy name. It was published on 4 October 1802, Wordsworth's wedding-day, the seventh anniversary of Coleridge's wedding-day. Wordsworth was married, Coleridge was in dejection.

## Chapter Six

### WORDSWORTH MARRIED

‘I long for a repose which ever is the same’

THE long years of happy intimacy which Wordsworth and Coleridge had expected were not to be. They were not even neighbours for eight of the twelve months which followed *Dejection*. Wordsworth was away from <sup>1</sup> 9 July to 6 October 1802, when he returned with his bride. A month later Coleridge set off to escape the northern winter and to spend much time with Tom Wedgwood, a sick man. He came home on Christmas Eve for some hurried weeks and, passing through Grasmere, learnt from the Wordsworths of the birth the day before of his daughter, Sara. He came home in April 1803 and on 30 April Dorothy tells her brother John that ‘Coleridge is ill in a rheumatic fever, and all his family have got the Influenza.’ On 26 June William told his brother Richard that Coleridge’s illness had ‘confined him to his bed for nearly half these nine months, and disabled him from writing the other half’. Nevertheless William, Dorothy and Coleridge set off from Keswick on 15 August 1803 for the famous Scotch tour. On 29 August they parted company by agreement: Coleridge got home on 15 September, the Wordsworths on 25 September. Coleridge did not leave home at the beginning of November 1803 as

<sup>1</sup> He left Coleridge on 12 July.



in 1801 and 1802, but the warm climate for which he had been longing was at last becoming possible. He left home on 20 December *en route* for Malta. At Grasmere he was taken ill and he had to stay there till 14 January 1804. There were many more delays. The war with France had started again on 18 May 1803, Malta being part of the *casus belli*. Ships had to be escorted. Not till 9 April 1804 did Coleridge leave Portsmouth in the *Speedwell*. Twenty-four months had elapsed since *Dejection*: for only twelve of them had the two poets been near each other.

Wordsworth's poetic activity in the twelve weeks' interval between his return from Mary and his setting out again on 9 July 1802 included *The Leech Gatherer* and some Spenserian stanzas 'in the manner of Thomson's *Castle of Indolence*'. *The Leech Gatherer* is partly a reply to *Dejection*.

. . . from the might  
Of joy in minds that can no further go,  
As high as we have mounted in delight  
In our dejection do we sink as low.

The joy sung by Coleridge is real and so is the poet's reaction from it. Wordsworth, looking at the past—at Chatterton and Burns, 'mighty Poets in their misery dead'—had been dejected about his own future. Inspired by the example of the visionary leech-gatherer, developed from the actual leech-gatherer met by him and Dorothy nineteen months before, he will be resolute and independent. There is not a word about Coleridge, nor, in spite of their concern about him, is

there any reason to suppose that the Wordsworths knew that Coleridge's best poetry was all behind him. Yet they must to some extent have shared the growing general view that irresolution and dependence were irremediable elements in Coleridge's character. On the other hand, resolution and independence, admirable qualities, are not enough for a poet.

On 9 May, the day *The Leech Gatherer* was first finished, Wordsworth began 'the stanzas about C. and himself', which he finished during the next two days. These *Stanzas Written in my Pocket-Copy of Thomson's 'Castle of Indolence'* are notable. He eschews most of Thomson's Spenserian archaisms, but the eight stanzas would fit in pretty well to Thomson's first Canto, somewhere about stanza LXVIII which describes Thomson himself—'A bard here dwelt, more fat than bard beseems'. The first four stanzas describe Wordsworth himself, the next three Coleridge, and the eighth and last the two together. Wordsworth is still the 'idler in the land' of *A Poet's Epitaph*, but it is a very busy idleness. He often overworked and even made himself ill, much to Dorothy's concern. The demon of poetry came strongly upon him and forbade him to stop.

Within our happy Castle there dwelt One  
Whom without blame I may not overlook;  
For never sun on living creature shone  
Who more devout enjoyment with us took:  
Here on his hours he hung as on a book,  
On his own time here would he float away,  
As doth a fly upon a summer brook;  
But go to-morrow, or belike to-day,  
Seek for him—he is fled; and whither none can say.



Thus often would he leave our peaceful home,  
 And find elsewhere his business or delight;  
 Out of our Valley's limits did he roam:  
 Full many a time, upon a stormy night,  
 His voice came to us from the neighbouring height:  
 Oft could we see him driving full in view  
 At mid-day when the sun was shining bright;  
 What ill was on him, what he had to do,  
 A mighty wonder bred among our quiet crew.

Ah! piteous sight it was to see this Man  
 When he came back to us, a withered flower,—  
 Or like a sinful creature, pale and wan.  
 Down would he sit; and without strength or power  
 Look at the common grass from hour to hour:  
 And oftentimes, how long I fear to say,  
 Where apple-trees in blossom made a bower,  
 Retired in that sunshiny shade he lay;  
 And, like a naked Indian, slept himself away.

Great wonder to our gentle tribe it was  
 Whenever from our Valley he withdrew;  
 For happier soul no living creature has  
 Than he had, being here the long day through.  
 Some thought he was a lover, and did woo:  
 Some thought far worse of him, and judged him wrong;  
 But verse was what he had been wedded to;  
 And his own mind did like a tempest strong  
 Come to him thus, and drove the weary Wight along.

Thus Wordsworth, as he thought he seemed to others and as he really was—a strong young poet at the height of his power and dominated by that power. Now Coleridge, a stranger in this land as Wordsworth had been in Somerset, something of a Will Wimble, making a little aeolian harp out of grasses, toying with his microscope.

With him there often walked in friendly guise,  
Or lay upon the moss by brook or tree,  
A noticeable Man with large grey eyes,  
And a pale face that seemed undoubtedly  
As if a blooming face it ought to be;  
Heavy his low-hung lip did oft appear,  
Deprest by weight of musing Phantasy;  
Profound his forehead was, though not severe;  
Yet some did think that he had little business here:

Sweet heaven forefend! his was a lawful right;  
Noisy he was, and gamesome as a boy;  
His limbs would toss about him with delight,  
Like branches when strong winds the trees annoy.  
Nor lacked his calmer hours device or toy  
To banish listlessness and irksome care;  
He would have taught you how you might employ  
Yourself; and many did to him repair—  
And certes not in vain; he had inventions rare.

Expedients, too, of simplest sort he tried:  
Long blades of grass, plucked round him as he lay,  
Made, to his ear attentively applied,  
A pipe on which the wind would deftly play;  
Glasses he had, that little things display,  
The beetle panoplied in gems and gold,  
A mailed angel on a battle-day;  
The mysteries that cups of flowers enfold,  
And all the gorgeous sights which fairies do behold.

That is Coleridge in good health on a genial day, the  
leaper over gates, playful with puns and polysyllables,  
an irresistible companion.

He would entice that other Man to hear  
His music, and to view his imagery:  
And, sooth, these two were each to other dear:



No livelier love in such a place could be:  
 There did they dwell—from earthly labour free,  
 As happy spirits as were ever seen;  
 If but a bird, to keep them company,  
 Or butterfly sate down, they were, I ween,  
 As pleased as if the same had been a Maiden-queen.

It is a measure of the Victorian ignorance about Wordsworth and Coleridge that Matthew Arnold, in 1879, thought the stanzas describing Wordsworth described Coleridge and *vice versa*.

They were not quite 'from earthly labour free'. That is *The Castle of Indolence* influence. Yet our picture of them in these happy days will be helped by Dorothy's description of the morning of Friday 23 April 1802.

Coleridge and I pushed on before. We left William sitting on the stones, feasting with silence; and C. and I sat down upon a rocky seat—a couch it might be under the bower of William's eglantine, Andrew's Broom. He was below us, and we could see him. He came to us, and repeated his poems while we sat beside him upon the ground. He had made himself a seat in the crumbling ground. Afterwards we lingered long, looking into the vales,—Ambleside vale, with the copses, the village under the hill, and the green fields—Rydale, with a lake all alive and glittering, yet but little stirred by breezes, and our own dear Grasmere, first making a little round lake of nature's own, with never a house, never a green field, but the copses and the bare hills enclosing it, and the river flowing out of it. Above rose the Coniston Fells, in their own shape and colour—not man's hills, but all for themselves, the sky and the clouds, and a few wild creatures. C. went to search for something new. We saw him climbing up towards a rock. He called us, and

we found him in a bower—the sweetest that was ever seen. . . . After dinner Wm. and I worked in the garden.

These weeks were the last really good time. Wordsworth went away, first to Yorkshire, then for that strange August at Calais where ‘We walked by the sea-shore almost every evening with Annette and Caroline, or Wm. and I alone’, then back in London with a visit to Windsor, where Uncle Cookson was now a canon and perhaps beginning to feel that William was after all making good, then back to Yorkshire for the marriage.

Meanwhile Coleridge had come to some sort of understanding with his wife. Early in June the Wordsworths decided not to move to Greta Hall or nearby. On 6 June a letter from Coleridge came to Grasmere, next day Dorothy wrote to Mrs. Coleridge, on Thursday the 10th Coleridge came to Grasmere ‘with a sack full of books etc.’, having not even come the easiest way with his load. ‘Mrs. Coleridge’, Dorothy told the Hutchinsons, ‘is a most extraordinary character—she is the lightest weakest silliest woman! She sent some clean clothes on Thursday to meet C. (the first time she ever did such a thing in her life) from which I guess that she is determined to be attentive to him—she wrote a note, saying not a word about my letter, and all in her very lightest style . . . she concludes “my love to the Ws—” Is not it a hopeless case?’ Bursting out like that is unusual for the charitable and affectionate Dorothy, but to have one’s serious letter thus ignored!



The real crisis may have come after the Wordsworths had gone. Coleridge then suggested they should separate. This had a sobering effect. Coleridge wrote to Southey about it on 29 July 1802.

Our virtues and our vices are exact antitheses. I so attentively watch my own nature that my worst self-delusion is a complete self-knowledge so mixed with intellectual complacency, that my quickness to see and readiness to acknowledge my faults is too often frustrated by the small pain which the sight of them gives me, and the consequent slowness to amend them. Mrs. C. is so stung with the very first thought of being in the wrong, because she never endures to look at her own mind in all its faulty parts, but shelters herself from painful self-inquiry by angry recrimination. Never, I suppose, did the stern match-maker bring together two minds so utterly contrariant in their primary and organical constitutions. Alas! I have suffered more, I think, from the amiable propensities of my nature than from my worst faults and most erroneous habits, and I have suffered much from both. But, as I said, Mrs. Coleridge was made *serious*.

They settled down to a determined attempt at mutual forbearance, Mrs. Coleridge would give up her unkindnesses and Coleridge his fault-finding. Nothing could put right the work of the match-maker—and that had been Southey—but for a year and a half the two got on pretty well together, Coleridge, of course, being away most of the next winter. The expectation and arrival of another child may have helped. Both parents were intensely fond of their children, and the children, for all her 'fiddle-faddling', loved their mother.

The arrival of visitors may also have helped. In those 'wonderful days unexpected friends from a distance could turn up in the evening sure of a welcome and stay for three weeks. So in the middle of August came Charles and Mary Lamb. Charles was almost converted to mountains, though not for a permanent home. Soon after the Lambs left, on 11 September 1802, the *Morning Post* published Coleridge's one important poem of Lakeland inspiration, the one worth-while 'nature' poem he would not have written if he had not followed Wordsworth to the north—the Cumbrian names and scenery of *Christabel* Part II hardly count. The surprising title of the poem was *Chamouny The Hour before Sunrise A Hymn*. Coleridge had never been to Chamonix. He had read the much shorter *Chamouny beym Sonnenaufgange* of Friederika Brun. He had had this August a week's walking in the hills and had climbed Scafell. 'Nature' and literature combined to produce this grand psalm.

Wordsworth returned married. A friend married was not a friend lost, for the Hutchinsons were in full sympathy with Coleridge. One two-day visit to Grasmere is recorded in Dorothy's *Journal*, and in November he was away. There was the brief Christmas return. Dorothy's *Grasmere Journals* end with 16 January 1803. After that, except for tours, details have to be picked out of letters. We know Coleridge was ill much of the spring. He ought never to have been allowed to get wet, but it often happened and often he did not suffer for it immediately. Though he was often ill, he often seemed well. He stood godfather on



15 July to Wordsworth's child (his own were baptized the *following* November). When Sir George and Lady Beaumont, whom he already knew, took lodgings and found they were next door to Coleridge, Coleridge quickly effaced the not wholly favourable impression he had made in London. He was the means of introducing Wordsworth to them. Beaumont took to Wordsworth at once and bought and gave him a plot of land where he could build a house and be nearer Coleridge. He did not build the house, but the Beaumont connexion became important. It was Beaumont's painting which Wordsworth described in *Peele Castle*. It was Beaumont (whose other claim to fame is that he instigated the foundation of the National Gallery) who became—in the nicest possible way—Wordsworth's patron. Yet how far that or any patronage was good for Wordsworth the poet is a question worth considering.

As soon as the Beaumonts had left Keswick, all the Wordsworths arrived. On Sunday 14 August Mary and the eight-weeks-old baby went back to Grasmere. On Monday morning, William, Dorothy and Coleridge started on the Scotch tour. Dorothy's *Recollections of a Tour made in Scotland A.D. 1803* was written afterwards and was meant to be read by their friends. It lacks the unguarded intimacy of the *Journals*. It is excellent reading. For Coleridge the tour was an experiment. It is necessary to remember that, if one is to understand his parting from the other two on the fifteenth day.

The 'tour of 6 weeks in Scotland, Dorothy I and Coleridge . . . with one Horse only' had been settled by the mid-July christening day. Thereafter Coleridge

was in doubt about it. Even the day before they started he wrote to Southey 'I will try this tour—if I cannot bear it I will return from Glasgow'. It was 'an experiment for exercise etc.', he later told a 'kind old man' at Fort William. To Southey he said he had been very ill and in serious dread of a paralytic stroke in his whole left side. It was 'atonic gout'. He had described his symptoms to Wordsworth and had afterwards found the same description almost word for word in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Vol. XI, Part I, No. 213, p. 181, and the first five paragraphs of the second column. 'I live very temperately—drinking only one tumbler of brandy and water in the 24 hours, but when I wake screaming I take tea or coffee with an egg and a good deal of cayenne pepper, which seems to procure me ease and sometimes sleep, though no doubt it injures me in the long run.' He was in occasional communication with the famous Dr. Beddoes in Bristol, but does not seem to have had any regular medical advice. He tried various anodynes, including ether by the spoonful. Of course he sometimes made a mistake and overdid it: he knew the 'effect of intoxication by an overdose of some narcotic Drug—weeping—vomiting wakefulness' etc. He had been a very sick man for over two and a half years. He wanted to go to a warm climate. Failing that he would try anything. Six weeks touring Scotland *might* help. There is no evidence, even when we allow for the notorious untruthfulness of drug addicts, that he had yet become an addict for the sake of the drug—rather the opposite. The medical knowledge of the day could not cope with him.



The prospect of the tour being a success for Coleridge was not increased by the later decision to use an Irish jaunting car for the sake, presumably, of Dorothy and of the baggage. Wordsworth drove, sitting in the 'dicky', the others had to sit behind him with their backs to the middle of the road. This hardly made for the conversational heaven of November 1799, when the two men had walked all over the Lake country, or of other times when they had enjoyed eager talk with little brown Dorothy following and listening to their 'dear voices'—not, of course, that the walks of the three were always like that. Now Wordsworth, who was definitely in charge of the party, was busy driving as well as taking in the scenery and, often, filled with poetic exaltation. That is, perhaps, a more likely explanation of his taciturnity on this occasion than the melancholy streak which he admitted to exist in his character. For once Coleridge did not find a ready partaker in his conversation. 'Wordsworth's hypochondriacal feelings', he explained to Mrs. Coleridge, 'kept him silent and self-centred.' There was not enough self-understanding or mutual understanding about the arrangements for this tour. Coleridge hated sitting on the cushioned car and being rained on. It was better when they got to places, left 'the car' and went sightseeing on foot or were rowed over lakes.

They heard of one other jaunting car in the Lowlands, but their own appearance in one brought smiles from many and sometimes hoots from small boys. They passed through Carlisle and Dumfries, where the tour became for a time a Burns pilgrimage, though at the

next inn after Dumfries 'William and I walked out after dinner; C. was not well, and slept upon the carriage cushions.' However he kept fairly well, he did not leave the others at Glasgow, reached on the eighth day. They went on to Dumbarton and Loch Lomond and entered the Highlands at Luss on the tenth day. Together they visited Loch Katrine and the Trossachs. Coleridge was with them in the ferryman's hut where, after a wonderful but soaking day, 'we caroused our cups of coffee, laughing like children at the strange atmosphere in which we were: the smoke came in gusts, and spread along the walls and above our heads in the chimney, where the hens were roosting like light clouds in the sky; we laughed and laughed again, in spite of the smarting of our eyes, yet had a quieter pleasure in observing the beauty of the beams and rafters gleaming between the clouds of smoke.' Next day they got soaked again. Their clothes were dried at the ferryhouse at Inversneyde, where Wordsworth found the inspiration for his *To a Highland Girl*:

Twice seven consenting years have shed  
Their utmost bounty on thy head

Thy elder Brother I would be,  
Thy Father—any thing to thee.

His own daughter was nearly eleven.

Next day, the fifteenth of the tour, Monday 29 August, Coleridge left the Wordsworths, who went on with their thoughts full of him, anxious about his getting home 'sickly and alone'. Rheumatism had got into his head. 'William proposed to me to leave them. . . . He



and Dorothy resolved to fight it out. I eagerly caught at the proposal; for the *sitting* in an open carriage in the rain is death to me.' He sent his clothes on to Edinburgh and set out to walk back to Loch Katrine and then the twenty miles to Stirling where he would get a coach for Edinburgh. From Edinburgh he could coach home. He did so—in the end.

It was about five o'clock on an August afternoon. He had got dry. The weather had cleared. He was free of the cursed car. He went back part of the way, but why should he not see the rest of the Highlands after all? So on Wednesday morning 'having found myself so happy alone (such blessing is there in perfect liberty!) I walked off' to cover not much less than four hundred miles in thirteen days and a quarter—Glencoe, Ballachulish, Fort William, Fort Augustus, Inverness, and south to Perth and the Edinburgh coach. He overdid it terribly. He wore out his shoes, exhausted his purse, had a hysterical attack, vomiting, nightmare. It was all very well for the 'kind old man' at Fort William to say 'I never saw a man walk so well or so briskly as this young gentleman did'. In eight days after getting new shoes he covered 263 miles. From Edinburgh the young gentleman wrote to Southey 'O God! when a man blesses the loud screams of agony that awake him night after night, night after night, and when a man's repeated night screams have made him a nuisance in his own house, it is better to die than to live', and he sent the first form of *The Pains of Sleep* which ended

With such let fiends make mockery—  
But I—Oh, wherefore this *on me*?

Frail is my soul, yea, strengthless wholly,  
Unequal, restless, melancholy;  
But free from Hate and sensual Folly.  
To be belov'd is all I need,  
And whom I love, I love indeed.

The 'experiment for exercise etc.' had failed. The next experiment would be Madeira if possible; if not possible, then the invitation he had received for Malta would be accepted.

For Wordsworth the Scotch tour was an outstanding success. It was the last fully vitalizing long episode in his life. The dreariness, the beauty and the loneliness of the Highlands provided what is peculiarly Wordsworth's—the gleam on gloom. This is the primary mark of those renovating 'spots of time' which owed nothing to anyone else. Gleam on gloom is the rainbow above the storm. In 1804, philosophizing on the 'analogy betwixt the mind of man and nature', Wordsworth collected other examples.<sup>1</sup> There was the

. . . horse, that stood  
Alone upon a little breast of ground  
With a clear silver moonlight sky behind.  
With one leg from the ground the creature stood  
Insensible and still,—breath, motion gone,  
Mane, ears, and tail, as lifeless as the trunk  
That had no stir of breath; we paused awhile  
In pleasure of the sight.

Books could give the same thrill. There was Sir Humphrey Gilbert just before he was engulfed. There was Mungo Park in the wilderness, fainting and

<sup>1</sup> A long cancelled passage of *The Prelude* (ed. de Selincourt, 1926, pp. 600-5).



recovering to find 'His horse in quiet standing at his side'. There was Dampier who saw

. . . those portents of the broken wheel  
Girding the sun, and afterwards the sea  
Roaring, and whitening at the night's approach,  
And danger coming on.

As a boy Wordsworth drank 'the visionary power' as he stood

Beneath some rock, listening to sounds that are  
The ghostly language of the ancient earth,  
Or make their dim abode in distant winds.

As a boy he experienced, when lost on the moor, 'the visionary dreariness' of

A naked Pool that lay beneath the hills,  
The Beacon on the summit, and more near,  
A Girl who bore a Pitcher on her head  
And seem'd with difficult steps to force her way  
Against the blowing wind.

As a boy he supplied, from within, the gleam which fell upon

. . . the wind and sleety rain  
And all the business of the elements,  
The single sheep, and the one blasted tree,  
And the bleak music of that old stone wall,  
The noise of wood and water, and the mist  
Which on the line of each of those two Roads  
Advanced in such indisputable shapes.

There is the famous passage in *The Prelude* about crossing the Alps: there is, above all, the famous description, in the last book, of the moon over the mists and precipices of Snowdon.

None of this kind of experience was derived from Dorothy, none of it (apart from the interpretation) from Coleridge. This was fundamental Wordsworth and in this he was reinforced in full measure by the tour in the Highlands. One can find it again and again in Dorothy's *Recollections*. Here is Wednesday, 31 August—the place does not matter—the spectators brought their souls with them:

The castle occupied every foot of the island that was visible to us, appearing to rise out of the water; mists rested upon the mountain side, with spots of sunshine between; there was a mild desolation in the low grounds, a solemn grandeur in the mountains, and the castle was wild, yet stately.

Now that is Dorothy describing a view she came on when temporarily separated from William. He had taught her quite as much as she had taught him. It is totally different from the inspiration of Coleridge's *Chamouny*, much more primitive, not psalmodic. But did Wordsworth lose as well as gain from being civilized and mellowed by his sister, from being intellectualized and religionized by Coleridge?

The stimulus of the Scotch tour lasted long. It was reinforced in a few months by another stimulus—his coming bereavement of Coleridge. Who knew whether Coleridge would come back? In those early months of 1804, while Coleridge was waiting in London for his ship, Wordsworth really got going on the 'Poem to Coleridge', the poem on his own life, posthumously called *The Prelude*. Coleridge took a copy of Books I–V to Malta. Wordsworth also completed his *Ode*, almost



certainly in March 1804 in time for Coleridge to take it also. The *Ode* is Wordsworth's new *Benedicite*, yet of sinister omen in its acceptance of loss and its resignation to 'the philosophic mind': the philosophic mind is of no use without deep and continuing experience. One suspects that the healthy man has caught, in a milder form, the sick man's dejection. Behind the whole *Ode* one sees Wordsworth and Coleridge in fusion and in conflict.

A different and simpler connexion between the two is shown in stanzas VII and VIII. The child is Hartley Coleridge—the 'four years' Darling' (not 'six' as in the 1815 version). In March 1804 Hartley was seven and a half. It is like Wordsworth to go back to an earlier 'hiding-place'.<sup>1</sup> He is thinking specially of Hartley in the spring of 1801, when he came to Townend for a long visit and attended Grasmere school. And how exact Wordsworth is about Hartley's parents — 'With light upon him from his father's eyes' and the 'sallies of his mother's kisses'. He adopts in all seriousness Lamb's nickname for Hartley, 'the Philosopher', which goes back to the winter of 1799-1800, when Hartley was only three. It may be that the description of the grave as 'A place of thought where we in waiting lie' reflects some saying of 'the

<sup>1</sup> Unless indeed, these two stanzas are earlier and were lifted from the poem *To H. C. Six Years Old*, which Coleridge perhaps dated 1801 when Hartley was four. *Ode* Stanza VII, *To H. C.* Stanza I, *Ode* Stanza VIII, *To H. C.* Stanza II (subject to some of the verbal changes Wordsworth was always making) would make a complete 4-stanza Hartley poem, the last lines recalling Marvell's *On a Drop of Dew* and *Little T. C.*

Philosopher' or it may merely remember *We Are Seven*. Wordsworth's prophecy at the end of stanza VIII was wrong.

Full soon thy Soul shall have her earthly freight,  
And custom lie upon thee with a weight,  
Heavy as frost, and deep almost as life!

It was his father's prophecy in *Frost at Midnight* which was to be fulfilled.

The sinister omen of the *Ode*, the misgivings of *Resolution and Independence*, appear in full force in the *Ode to Duty*, which (not exactly as published in 1807) probably dates from January 1804, thus preceding the completion of the first *Ode*. Inspiration is uncertain, a married man must support his wife and family, 'me this perpetual freedom tires'—even after the glory of the Scottish tour! It was his farewell to the life dedicated solely to poetry, his farewell to that for which, as Blake would have put it, he was specially 'organized by Divine Providence'. Not Providence but Prudence was winning, and he was so happily married. He not only longed for but got 'a repose which ever is the same'. Seeking 'a solid without fluctuation' was the great mistake of Blake's Urizen.<sup>1</sup> The *Ode to Duty*, written only about fifteen months after Wordsworth's marriage, marks his turning-point. He had still much of his best to write, but he was to get less and less new inspiration. After seven such glorious

<sup>1</sup> Blake was always concerned with keeping his 'gates' open; Wordsworth more and more with filling his mental cupboard. Hence Blake had no need to take thought for the spiritual morrow.



years as Wordsworth had had a man does not suddenly sink into the commonplace. He could go on for years living on his spiritual capital, but his income would steadily decrease. Coleridge understood and was horrified. 'I remember', he wrote in his notebook in Malta, 'having written a strong letter to my most dear and honoured W. in consequence of his Ode to Duty.'<sup>1</sup>

But Coleridge, in the agony which produced *The Pains of Sleep*, had also cried out for repose. 'Change! change! change! O God of Eternity! When shall we be at rest in thee?'

<sup>1</sup> de Selincourt, *Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, iv, p. 418.

## Chapter Seven

### WORDSWORTH'S 'POEM TO COLERIDGE'

'O Friend! O Poet! Brother of my soul'

FIVE chief streams, of varying volume and impetus, four at least of them deriving in part from Coleridge, flowed together to form the wide river of *The Prelude*. There were also minor rills which joined it.

1. First, back in the *annus mirabilis*, in the summer of 1797, there was a literal stream, the brook which ran past Alfoxden Park. Coleridge's interest in it was one of the suspicious circumstances investigated by the detective. He was meditating a poem in which a brook would flow 'to the sheepfold; to the first cultivated plot of ground; to the lonely cottage and its bleak garden won from the heath; to the hamlet, the villages, the market-town, the manufactories, and the seaport'. Wordsworth's much later sonnet sequence *The River Duddon* may have owed something to this suggestion, but Coleridge's idea was much more ambitious. His poem was to contain 'description, incident, and impassioned reflections on men, nature and society'. Even though they do not appear in print till the *Biographia Literaria* (1817), these last words are significant. For 'Nature, Man, and Society' is precisely the subject of the blank verse poem of which Wordsworth had written 1,300 lines by 6 March 1798.



'Its title will be *The Recluse, or Views of Nature, Man, and Society.*' It is impossible that its inception had not been preceded by long and eager discussions with Coleridge, that Coleridge had not, as he later said, 'partly suggested' it. In Coleridge's *Table Talk* (21 July 1832) doubtless memory is partly overlaid by later thoughts, but it is interesting to note that the geographical scheme has been superseded by a historical one. Wordsworth was to 'assume the station of a man in mental repose, one whose principles were made up, and so prepared to deliver upon authority a system of philosophy. He was to treat man as man,—a subject of eye, ear, touch, and taste, in contact with external nature, and informing the senses from the mind, and not compounding a mind out of the senses; then he was to describe the pastoral and other states of society, assuming something of the Juvenalian spirit as he approached the high civilization of cities and towns, and opening a melancholy picture of the present state of degeneracy and vice; thence he was to infer and reveal the proof of, and necessity for, the whole state of man and society being subject to, and illustrative of, a redemptive process in operation, showing how this idea reconciled all the anomalies, and promised future glory and restoration. Something of this sort was, I think, agreed on. It is, in substance, what I have been all my life doing in my system of philosophy.'

The Juvenalian element in Book VII of *The Prelude* and the brief history of religions in Book IV of *The Excursion* show something of this scheme, but on the whole Coleridge, with his oft-repeated insistence that

Wordsworth must write this great philosophic poem *The Recluse*, was hanging a weight round Wordsworth's neck. He doomed Wordsworth to be, like himself, the intending author of a Great Work never completed. The philosophical poem is almost a contradiction in terms. The backbone and ostensible body of a successful long poem cannot be philosophy. Of Lucretius there are more opinions than one: one opinion is that *De Rerum Natura* consists of streaks of poetry which is not philosophy and of philosophy which is not poetry. Which is Pope's *Essay on Man*? Perhaps, on the whole, neither. Bridges's *Testament of Beauty* has much beauty, but, as a poem, how forgettable it is. The fact is that philosophy must argue carefully and at length. That has its place and purpose but is the death of poetry. Quite rightly did Pope object to philosophical passages in *Paradise Lost* where 'God the Father turns a school-divine'. Milton said his aim was to justify the ways of God to Man, but, except in a few unfortunate passages, he was too true a poet to argue about it. He showed it in a tragedy, with Adam as the hero who falls through a flaw in his character, and with Satan as the tremendous villain who (like Macbeth) can carry our unregenerate natures along in sympathy with him but who eventually sinks to toad or snake; the heavenly machinery controls all to a destined and redemptive end. Such a structure for *The Recluse* Wordsworth never found, because 'views of Nature, Man, and Society' can only be the leaves, never the tree, of poetry. Coleridge, who was not good at purely literary structure, was here no help to Words-



worth. Wordsworth himself had, just like Milton, thought of and discarded many plans for a major work. He recounts them in *The Prelude* I.

Yet *The Recluse* was started. What, if they survive, were most of those 1,300 lines written by 6 March 1798, we do not know. About 100 of them were the first form of the magnificent passage attached in 1800 to 'Home at Grasmere' (*The Recluse*, Book I) and published in 1814 as a 'Prospectus' to the Excursion.

On Man, on Nature, and on Human Life,  
 Musing in solitude . . .  
 All strength—all terror, single or in bands,  
 That ever was put forth in personal form—  
 Jehovah—with his thunder, and the choir  
 Of shouting Angels, and the empyreal thrones—  
 I pass them unalarmed. Not Chaos, not  
 The darkest pit of lowest Erebus,  
 Nor aught of blinder vacancy, scooped out  
 By help of dreams—can breed such fear and awe  
 As fall upon us often when we look  
 Into our Minds, into the Mind of Man—  
 My haunt, and the main region of my song.

This whole passage surely is what as 'a glad preamble' to *The Recluse* he sang 'in Dythyrambic fervour'<sup>1</sup> six years before, in the spring of 1804, he began on *The Prelude* VII. When he wrote it he was 'saluted' by an 'animating breeze', a 'vital breeze' which he had known before, the 'intellectual breeze' which

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise stated, quotations from *The Prelude* are from the '1805-6' text (of which the *composition* was completed in 1805), the one read to Coleridge. 'Five' years, VII, 1, was later corrected to 'six', but can be explained as the calendar years 1799, 1800, 1, 2, 3.

sweeps over 'animated nature' in Coleridge's *Eolian Harp*—the breath of the Spirit. All poets know it. It was the same quickening breeze (which can become a storm) which Wordsworth had experienced in 1795. Then after months in the 'vast city'<sup>1</sup> of London and a further stay in Bristol, also a city, he had set out for a long walk which ended on the third day at Racedown. He felt free at last. A 'gentle breeze' (a literal breeze) blew against his cheek, and soon he 'felt within A corresponding mild creative breeze, A vital breeze which travell'd gently on O'er things which it had made'. Then and there he says he wrote the 54 lines, the earliest of his characteristically best, which later he put in the forefront of *The Prelude* (they are not in its earliest MSS.): it is, surely, not those nine-year-old lines which he called a 'glad preamble' nor do they exhibit 'Dythyrambic fervour'; but the 'animating breeze' had been the same on both occasions.

Work on *The Recluse* was interrupted by that for *Lyrical Ballads* and by the visit to Germany. In the second half of 1799 it was kept in his mind by Coleridge's insistence and was continued, as we know, in the first months at Grasmere. Its parts had little organic relation to one another. Some of it was to be absorbed in *The Prelude*.

2. In the summer of 1799 Coleridge just back from Germany entreated Wordsworth at Sockburn 'to go on with *The Recluse*'. He continued 'and I wish you would write a poem, in blank verse, addressed to those who, in consequence of the complete failure of the

<sup>1</sup> 1850 version.



French Revolution, have thrown up all hopes of the amelioration of mankind, and are sinking into an almost epicurean selfishness, disguising the same under the soft titles of domestic attachment and contempt for visionary *philosophes*. It would do great good, and might form a part of *The Recluse*, for in my present mood I am wholly against the publication of any small poems.'

Coleridge wanted this proposed poem to go into *The Recluse* because he wanted everything to go into *The Recluse*—a most unfortunate grandiosity, for here at hand in contemporary history, in the French Revolution, Wordsworth might have found an epic subject of tragic issue and intensity. From the mouths of its actors and sufferers might have come so much that Wordsworth had to say of deepest import. Wordsworth might have done, in his very different way, what Blake began but did not finish. All that he did at the moment was to versify some of the lines of Coleridge's letter and to say that, in spite of the 'melancholy waste of hopes o'erthrown', he did not despair: Nature provided 'a never-failing principle of joy'. Yet, though neither a separate poem nor a special section of *The Recluse* on this topic was written, Coleridge's hint was pregnant with consequence. When in 1804-5 Wordsworth settled to *The Prelude*, the exaltation of the early French Revolution, the agony caused by the Terror and the hard-won consolation are a chief theme of the second half. The theme overflowed into *The Excursion*.

3. We have seen that at Goslar Wordsworth turned

back to his childhood and wrote the celebrated passages about Nutting, Skating and the Stolen Boat. Then or when he was back in England he seems to have conceived the idea of a whole poem or collection of passages about his childhood, for one of the earliest MSS.<sup>1</sup> of a considerable part of *The Prelude* (dated 1799-1800 by de Selincourt) is just that. It consists, with minor differences from the '1805-6' version, of Book I from line 271 ('Was it for this?'), of Book II (except lines 1-54) and of passages about childhood now to be found in later books. This developed at the beginning of 1804 into 'a poem on my own earlier life'. It was to consist of five Books, was frankly autobiographic with no other special aim, was not part of *The Recluse* and had nothing particular to do with the French Revolution. The five Books were finished, fair copies were made and one was given to Coleridge to take with him to Malta in April.

4. Before this 'poem on my own earlier life' was finished Wordsworth found (or found again) that it had a bearing on the 'rigorous inquisition' into himself which he made when he could neither get on with *The Recluse* nor abandon it as beyond his powers. Self-understanding was becoming a necessity, and self-understanding might best be attained by examination of his own spiritual history. The poem drove him on. He could not stop at the end of his first Cambridge year when he was only eighteen. He had to go right on.

<sup>1</sup> MS. V. Some later information about MSS. is to be found in Miss Darbishire, *The Poet Wordsworth*, pp. 86, 88, 92, and in an additional note to de Selincourt's later editions.



Ten years later in the Preface to *The Excursion* he wrote—

Several years ago, when the Author retired to his native mountains, with the hope of being enabled to construct a literary Work that might live, it was a reasonable thing that he should take a review of his own mind, and examine how far Nature and Education had qualified him for such employment. As subsidiary to this preparation, he undertook to record, in verse, the origin and progress of his own powers, as far as he was acquainted with them. That Work, addressed to a dear Friend, most distinguished for his knowledge and genius, and to whom the Author's Intellect is deeply indebted, has been long finished; and the result of the investigation which gave rise to it was a determination to compose a philosophical poem, containing views of Man, Nature, and Society.

Just as Wordsworth's poems, like Coleridge's, were capable of being finished more than once, so he could determine more than once to write 'a philosophical poem, containing views of Man, Nature, and Society'. Those are like the words he used in March 1798 before the 'investigation' had been thought of, but it is completely true that he determined on *The Recluse* all over again in 1804 before he had finished *The Prelude*, which in 1805 'may be considered as a sort of *portico* to *The Recluse*, part of the same building, which I hope to be able, ere long, to begin with in earnest; and if I am permitted to bring it to a conclusion, and to write, further, a narrative Poem of the Epic Kind, I shall consider the *task* of my life as over'.

The origin of *The Prelude* was neither so deliberate nor so priggish as the Preface to *The Excursion* suggests.

It derived from the projected *Recluse*, from Coleridge's suggestion about the French Revolution, from Wordsworth's spontaneous poetry about his childhood, and, in its later two-thirds, from Wordsworth's rigorous self-inquisition.<sup>1</sup> But, once the poem got really going, it could not stop until, in the *annus mirabilis*, it caught up with Coleridge to whom it was addressed.

5. For that address is the fifth source. Some time in the summer or autumn of 1799 Wordsworth wrote to Coleridge and said he would write a poem to him. Coleridge was delighted, but Coleridge was also a *Recluse* fanatic. By all means write the poem, but let it, like the French Revolution poem, be included in *The Recluse*, or rather let it conclude *The Recluse*. That will ensure that *The Recluse* is completed. 'O let it be the tail-piece of The Recluse! for of nothing but The Recluse can I hear patiently. That it is to be addressed to me makes me more desirous that it should not be a poem of itself.' Not with *The Recluse* but with the childhood poem did Wordsworth decide to connect Coleridge's name. An account by Wordsworth of Wordsworth's childhood addressed to Coleridge would correspond to the account by Coleridge of Coleridge's childhood addressed (in the form of a series of letters) to Poole: Wordsworth must have known it. The childhood poem became known domestically, though not of course to outsiders, as the 'poem to Coleridge'. On 26 December 1801

<sup>1</sup> Miss Darbishire's suggestion (pp. 93-4) that I, 55-271, was written in October 1803 seems to me highly probable. We know from Coleridge that something was written then and it is hard to see what else it can have been.



'Wm. wrote part of the poem to Coleridge', where 'wrote', according to Dorothy's habit, means 'copied out'. On 11 January 1803 'William was working at his poem to C.', which means he was engaged in the never-ending business of trying to improve. On 29 March 1804, when Coleridge was at Portsmouth and already had the fair copy of the five books, Dorothy wrote to him: 'William has begun another part of the Poem addressed to you.' Coleridge may have been surprised. At any rate once again a 'finished' poem was continuing to grow.

'The Poem to Coleridge' is no misnomer. Suppose someone who knew nothing of either Wordsworth or Coleridge were to read *The Prelude* for the first time. He would learn much not only about the Poet but about the Friend. In every single book, and scores of times in all, the Friend is addressed. Sometimes it is merely 'O Friend!', 'dear Friend', 'most beloved Friend', 'Dearest Friend', sometimes it is in passages of a few lines, sometimes in longer passages of which two run up to nearly a hundred lines. Twice only (VI, 237; XIII, 247) the name Coleridge is used—personal names are very rare in *The Prelude*. This deeply loved Friend can, because he knows the Poet (II, 74), be told bare truth as if in private talk (X, 372). There had been a difficult time when the Friend had helped to regulate the Poet's soul (X, 908), and now the Poet can call on the Friend, who is never absent from his thoughts, to give him strength for his task (III, 201). The Friend was country born but his schooldays, unlike the Poet's, had been passed in a city; yet by different roads the

two had become worshippers of Nature (II, 466), and both had as children enjoyed much freedom (V, 233). Both had been at Cambridge, the Friend later than the Poet, but in writing of Cambridge the Poet is writing of what the Friend remembers well (III, 314) and, though they were not contemporaries, the Poet is thinking always of his Friend's 'after sojourn in the self-same place' (VI, 298). The Friend had known unhappiness at Cambridge, but had been learned, eloquent and a deep student of philosophy (VI, 306). He was in ill health (VI, 329) and had therefore gone abroad (VI, 249; VII, 320), to Sicily where man is vile but the Friend can think of Timoleon and Theocritus, can visit Etna and search for the fountain Arethusa (X, 942-1039).

The Poet and the Friend have so much in common. There is the Poet's sister, true friend of both (VI, 215) and another Maid revered by both (VI, 239). There are memories of a summer on Quantock when they rejoiced in each other's poetry (XIII, 393). They have been together in the Lake country (IX, 397), enjoying not only Nature but discussion on the future of mankind: they have both known the Maid of Buttermere (VII, 328). When the Poet thinks of all that he would have lost if he had perished in the French Revolution, the climax is that he would have been 'even, beloved Friend! a soul To thee unknown' (X, 201). Part of his very theme, which has now become a history of 'the discipline And consummation of the Poet's mind' carried up to the point when he was capable of 'building up a work that should endure'



138 WORDSWORTH AND COLERIDGE 1795-1834  
(XIII, 278: i.e. to 1798 when *The Recluse* was begun),  
part of that very theme is the Friend himself, to whom  
one day a 'monument of glory will be raised' (XIII,  
430).

With such a theme,  
Coleridge! with this my argument, of thee  
Shall I be silent? O most loving Soul!  
Placed on this earth to love and understand,  
And from thy presence shed the light of love,  
Shall I be mute ere thou be spoken of?  
Thy gentle Spirit to my heart of hearts  
Did also find its way; and thus the life  
Of all things and the mighty unity  
In all which we behold, and feel, and are,  
Admitted more habitually a mild  
Interposition, and closelier gathering thoughts  
Of man and his concerns, such as become  
A human Creature, be he who he may!  
Poet, or destined for a humbler name;  
And so the deep enthusiastic joy,  
The rapture of the Hallelujah sent  
From all that breathes and is, was chasten'd, stemm'd  
And balanced by a Reason which indeed  
Is reason; duty and pathetic truth;  
And God and Man divided, as they ought,  
Between them the great system of the world  
Where Man is sphered, and which God animates.  
(XIII, 246-268.)

The animating breeze which comes from God and  
inspires the poet came to Wordsworth partly direct  
and partly through Coleridge. Wordsworth, though  
unorthodox enough, was no longer the 'semi-atheist'  
of the previous decade. In later years, when he became  
'orthodox', he was much shyer of 'God', as a com-

parison of this passage with the version published in 1850 illustrates.

It is worth noting that the longest tracts of *The Prelude* without mention of the Friend include just those passages about early childhood which were composed without thought of *The Recluse* or of being embodied in a poem to Coleridge, i.e. Books I and II except the beginning and end of each, the last third of Book IV, the two childhood experiences in the second half of Book XI. They also include the first half of Book VIII of which 90 lines are an overflow from *Michael*.

*The Prelude, or Growth of a Poet's Mind: an Autobiographical Poem* was the title given to it in 1850. Wordsworth never knew it as 'The Prelude', and he would probably have repudiated its formal description as 'an Autobiographical Poem' in spite of the fact that the 'poem on my own earlier life' had become by 1 May 1805 'the Poem on my own life' and that he called it 'biographical' in the Preface to *The Excursion*. Coleridge always referred to it as the 'Poem on the Growth of an Individual Mind' or used some variant of that. So did Wordsworth, e.g. to Miss Fenwick in 1843 it was 'the poem on the growth of my own mind'. The middle one of Mrs. Wordsworth's three titles is, therefore, correct. *The Growth of a Poet's Mind* is what it should have been called: much misunderstanding would have been avoided.

In the first place we should have been less likely to share Wordsworth's own mistaken view, expressed in the Preface to *The Excursion*, that *The Prelude* is a



'preparatory poem' having the same relation to the projected 'main Work' as 'the ante-chapel has to the body of a gothic church'. The so-called *Prelude* is no ante-chapel. It is a glorious cathedral, a poem not surpassed in imaginative psychology and in lyric fervour by anything of its kind in the whole range of English poetry before or since, surpassed in grandeur by *Paradise Lost* alone. Like *Paradise Lost* and every poem of such length it has some flat passages. It has a few of Wordsworth's own special infelicities which are caused by his determination to speak 'the language of men', his only too well justified revolt against 'poetic diction'. But when we refrain from judging by standards of absolute and unattainable perfection and take with joy and thankfulness what we are given, we find that we have (and Wordsworth did not know it!) the very poem 'On Man, on Nature, and on Human Life' at which he had been aiming. The structure is not the hopelessly ambitious and cumbersome one of world-history as suggested by Coleridge: it is that of a single life of twenty-eight years. Its subject is nothing less than the Mind of Man as illustrated by the growth of the individual mind the poet knew best, growth from childhood through world-shaking events, through abstruse study, through a continuing revelation of God within and behind Nature, through deep and tender human love for sister and for Friend. This is the cathedral which the architect knew not that he had built. Some parts of *The Excursion* added 'little cells, oratories, and sepulchral recesses' to it: some parts of *The Excursion* are more like the buildings in the

cathedral close, occupied by a kindly and dignified clergy not wholly adequate to the religion which produced the cathedral.

The second reason why 'Growth of a Poet's Mind' as sole title would have been so much better is that the reason for the inclusion or exclusion of mere biographical details would have been so much clearer. Moreover one must remember for whom it was written—for the poet himself, for Coleridge, for Dorothy and Mary in the first place, for the next circle of intimate friends such as the Beaumonts and Clarksons in the second place, and for ultimate publication. There was no initial intention that publication should be posthumous, though Wordsworth always thought of himself as writing for posterity at least as much as for his contemporaries. He wrote for publication, but the time of publication depended on many circumstances: *Peter Bell* was published after twenty-one years. The 'Growth of a Poet's Mind' might have been published much sooner than it was: Coleridge regretted that it was not published before *The Excursion*. This, as well as their irrelevance, explains the absence of most personal names. 'Dorothy' and 'Mary' are not named. We should, therefore, not be surprised to find the much less important 'Annette' unnamed. Both the purpose of the poem and consideration of its readers, actual or possible, explain the special treatment in Book IX of Wordsworth's love affair in France.

That the love affair had some influence on Wordsworth the poet is certain. *Laodamia* is enough to show that, and it may not be without significance that



*Laodamia* was written in 1814 when the end of the war once more reopened communication with Annette, when indeed a young French prisoner of war known to the Wordsworths returned to Paris and became engaged to Caroline. The influence has, however, often been over-emphasized or exaggerated. Wordsworth in his spiritual autobiography gives it its true place. It, like the Revolution of which it was for him a part, provided a dawn in which it was bliss to be alive—'Earth liv'd in one great presence of the spring'. It was a wonderful and unexpected experience. Wordsworth, not yet twenty-two, parentless, alone in a foreign country of which he was learning the language, fell easily and utterly in love with an ardent woman nearly four years his senior, perhaps his teacher of French. She was no less in love. We know the issue. Was Wordsworth in a poem, meant immediately for private, but eventually for public, circulation, so to ignore the decencies as to deal journalistically with the private life of a woman still alive and easily identifiable once the war was over (and no one knew it would last another ten years)? Was he, for that matter, in a poem on the growth of a poet's mind, to lay himself open to impertinent gossip or inquiry? Those who accuse Wordsworth of improper concealment should remember the restriction on the casting of first stones. By the thinly-veiled story of Vaudracour and Julia he told his intimate friends what his love for Annette had meant to him. I speak of *The Prelude* as it was read to Coleridge, not as it was prepared for the press nearly thirty, and published more than forty years later. I

speak, also, not of *Vaudracour and Julia* published as a separate poem of 308 lines in 1820 but of the original and longer version in *The Prelude*, IX, 554-933.

There may indeed have been a story 'related by my patriot Friend And others' which had a close resemblance to his own, and one must be cautious about giving biographical value to every detail. Certainly Wordsworth's baby was not left to him and did not die. What we can take as real are the intensity of the youthful love, the 'bars betwixt himself And the dear haven where he wish'd to be', the 'threaten'd shame' which made Julia move to another town, and their resolve that Vaudracour should depart in an endeavour to overcome the financial obstacles to marriage. It is not certain but is more than possible that there is a factual basis for the final days passed together by the two (IX, 704-730). If this account is based on a secret and hurried visit of Wordsworth to France in October 1793,<sup>1</sup> then it was an unhappy visit—Wordsworth feeling guilty about the executions, Annette abusing the revolutionaries, a lovers' meeting degenerating into a political *discussion* (in the French sense of the word). It may have been then that Wordsworth for the first time began to realize that marriage with Annette might be a mistake. Wordsworth's listeners must have thrilled to many a detail <sup>2</sup> they already knew well, but, most of all, not to details but to the recounted love—a love which had happened and which was over,

<sup>1</sup> See p. 111.

<sup>2</sup> There was, however, no 'snow upon the ground' in France that October, and the English October, as recorded in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, was mild.



which had had its minor and not omissible part in the growth of the poet's mind, which in the development of 'the main essential Power, Imagination' had been altogether less important than God and Nature, Beauty and Fear, Dorothy and Coleridge.

Of Coleridge's vicissitudes since he sailed away on 9 April 1804 more will be said in the next chapter. He landed again in England on 17 August 1806. He saw Wordsworth for three days at the end of October at Kendal: Coleridge was then a perplexed and apparently a broken man. The Wordsworths were on their way to Coleorton in Leicestershire where Sir George Beaumont had lent them a house for the winter. Coleridge went home to an agitated time with his wife and joined the Wordsworths at Coleorton, bringing Hartley with him, on 21 December. He stayed there with them till April. In January Wordsworth read aloud to him his poem. Of the first five books he had taken a copy to Malta, one or two passages of the rest he must have heard before, but the greater part of it, the great sweep and scope of it, its lovely tributes to Coleridge himself were new to him. He was deeply impressed. 'Eve after eve' the reading lasted. When it was finished he wrote the last of his poems that matter—the noble blank verse *To W. Wordsworth. Lines Composed, for the greater part on the Night, on which he finished the recitation of his Poem (in thirteen Books) concerning the growth and history of his own Mind, Jan. 7, 1807, Cole-orton, near Ashby de la Zouch*. That is the manuscript heading. As first published in 1817 the poem is a little shorter and there numbers 112 lines.

O Friend! O Teacher! God's great gift to me!  
Into my heart have I received that Lay

it began. He spoke of its 'Theme hard as high',

. . . of moments awful,  
Now in thy inner life, and now abroad,  
When power streamed from thee, and thy soul received  
The light reflected, as a light bestowed.

He spoke of the jubilation of the French Revolution,  
of 'that dear Hope afflicted and struck down', and of  
the final refusal to give way to despair, the very con-  
solation Coleridge had years before urged Wordsworth  
to give in a blank verse poem. Wordsworth had sung of  
that afflicted Hope

So summoned homeward, thenceforth calm and sure  
From the dread watch-tower of man's absolute self,  
With light unwaning on her eyes, to look  
Far on—herself a glory to behold,  
The Angel of the vision!

Wordsworth's greatness, in which Coleridge had  
always believed, was now utterly confirmed. He was a  
'great Bard . . . in the choir Of ever-enduring men'.  
And as poor Coleridge

. . . listened with a heart forlorn,  
The pulses of my being beat anew:  
And even as Life returns upon the drowned,  
Life's joy rekindling roused a throng of pains.

But he will not dwell on his own wasted genius, nor  
let Wordsworth 'impair the memory. . . . Of thy  
communion with my nobler mind'. 'Eve following



eve' he had listened with changing emotions to the 'various strain':

And when—O Friend! my comforter, my guide!  
Strong in thyself, and powerful to give strength!—  
Thy long sustained lay finally closed,  
And thy deep voice had ceased—yet thou thyself  
Wert still before mine eyes, and round us both  
That happy vision of beloved faces—  
(All whom I deepliest love—in one room all!)  
Scarce conscious, and yet conscious of its close  
I sate, my being blended in one thought  
(Thought was it? or aspiration? or resolve?)  
Absorbed, yet hanging still upon the sound—  
And when I rose, I found myself in prayer.

## *Chapter Eight*

### CHANGE AND DECAY

‘ A comfortless, and hidden well ’

WORDSWORTH was in France at the outbreak of the Wars of the Revolution and shared as a stranger in the enthusiasm of the young French army. Coleridge had an opposite experience. He was in the Mediterranean and in Italy during two of the most exciting years of the Napoleonic War, the years of Nelson's blockade of Toulon, of Trafalgar, of Ulm and Austerlitz, of Joseph Bonaparte's seizure of Naples. For over a year Coleridge served, first in an unofficial and then in an official capacity, under a naval officer, Sir Alexander Ball, the civil governor of Malta. Ball thought so highly both of Coleridge's companionship and, obviously, of his services that he held him for some months after he would have preferred to return home. Coleridge's plan had been to go by Trieste overland to Vienna and through Germany to Hamburg, where once more he would have taken the Yarmouth packet. The delay prevented that. It was even by chance only that he was not caught by the French at Naples. He happened to be on a visit to Rome. The French more or less respected the neutrality of the Papal State. He had left important papers at Naples and could not recover them. Not for some months could he get out of Italy. Eventually, in June 1806, he left Leghorn in an American



ship by the connivance of the captain who declared he was a fellow-American personally known to him. Coleridge's knowledge of men and affairs was much enhanced by these experiences.

He was dreadfully ill on the voyage out, especially between Gibraltar and Malta, but on the whole the first year away from England was one of comparatively good health. He enjoyed the hot summer of 1804 and three months, August to November, in Sicily, whence he reported, from Syracuse, on the weakness of the Neapolitan government in dealing with a French privateer: the small neutral was trying to avoid offending a potential enemy and was thereby offending an actual friend. The summer of 1805 Coleridge found too hot. He had much sickness in the months following, and the voyage home, which lasted fifty-five days including quarantine off Portsmouth, was even more of a hell than the voyage out. He seized an opportunity of landing in Kent and thereby let himself in for weeks of trouble over clearing his baggage from the London custom house.

The war had made private correspondence very difficult. Ships were captured by the enemy, mail expected at Malta was thought to have gone to the fleet off Toulon, correspondence was entrusted to private hands but was destroyed by the quarantine officers. Not for nearly four months after Coleridge had sailed did any news from him reach England. On 29 August his wife heard from him. In September the Wordsworths had a letter, but two earlier letters had failed to arrive. Coleridge's letter 'is mainly filled with

lamentations that he had received no letter from *any Body*'. During the whole period of his absence the Wordsworths' letters to others in England are full of anxious and affectionate references to him. If news has been received, it is passed on. More often 'no news of Coleridge' is the refrain. The cottage at Town-end was becoming too small for the growing family, but no decision about where to live could be taken till Coleridge had returned. They must live near him, and it was now clear that he must not remain in the Lake country. He was definitely expected back in the summer of 1805. That, indeed, was his own wish and it is quite possible that, if the foreign residence had been limited to one year, the subsequent troubles would not have occurred or not have been so bad. Again in the following winter his arrival was expected, but, now that Coleridge had left Malta, communication was hopeless. Early in December 1805 his wife received a letter, which must have been many weeks old and which spoke of his setting off for Vienna. In February 1806 Lamb heard from Dr Stoddart of Malta that he had been at Naples in December. In June Wordsworth heard from Stoddart that he was probably safe in Rome. In July he heard that he was at Leghorn. On 15 August he heard from the Coleridges of Ottery that he was in quarantine off Portsmouth. A fellow-passenger had written to friends at Exeter, who had passed on the news to Coleridge's relations. On Monday 18 August Coleridge, feeling 'uncommonly well', wrote to Wordsworth: not for eight months had anyone in England heard from him direct.



The Wordsworths' anxiety about him had been deep and continuous. He might be taken prisoner by the French in Italy. He might perish on the voyage home. On Christmas Day 1805 Dorothy wrote to Lady Beaumont—'I am too often haunted with dreadful images of Shipwrecks and the Sea when I am in bed and hear a stormy wind, and now that we are thinking so much about Coleridge it is worse than ever'. There was a very special reason for that fear. On 6 February 1805 Captain John Wordsworth of the merchant service had gone down with his ship off Portland. He was the best-loved of William's brothers, 'a Poet in every thing but words', he had spent many months at Town-end, he was going to settle near there as soon as he had acquired a competence, he would—there is good reason to believe—have married Sarah Hutchinson. His death caused an intense shock. For many weeks the Wordsworths could think or write of little else. Poetry stopped: nothing was added to the 'poem on my own life' for three months, though later, in *The Character of the Happy Warrior* and in the *Peele Castle* stanzas, John Wordsworth's life and death left their mark on English poetry.

How would Coleridge hear of the death of John, 'worthy . . . of the friendship of Coleridge'? 'I tremble for the moment when he is to hear of my brother's death; it will distress him to the heart,—and his poor body cannot bear sorrow. He loved my brother, and he knows how we at Grasmere loved him.' Wordsworth was certain, he reiterates his certainty, that, as soon as Coleridge heard, he would

hurry back. In fact Coleridge was told casually at a reception. He staggered and fell, so damaging his head that he was confined to bed for a fortnight. His wish to leave Malta in the spring of 1805 could not be granted.

Ten weeks to a day elapsed between Coleridge's landing in England and his meeting the Wordsworths again in a room at Kendal in the evening of Sunday 26 October 1806. It had been an agitating interval of which more will be said, but nothing had prepared Coleridge's friends for the shock of that meeting—the first since he left Grasmere on 14 January 1804. Extracts from Dorothy's letter have often been quoted:

Never never did I feel such a shock as at first sight of him. We all felt exactly in the same way—as if he were different from what we have expected to see; almost as much as a person of whom we have thought much, and of whom we had formed an image in our own minds, without having any personal knowledge of him. . . . He is utterly changed; and yet sometimes, when he was animated in conversation concerning things removed from him, I saw something of his former self. . . . He did not complain of his health, and his appetite appeared to be not bad; but that he is ill I am well assured, and must sink if he does not grow more happy. His fatness has quite changed him—it is more like the flesh of a person in a dropsy than one in health; his eyes are lost in it . . . of the divine expression of his countenance . . . a shadow, a gleam there was at times, but how faint and transitory!

The fatness may have been partly due to lack of exercise. Coleridge had complained that Malta offered no scope for the great walks he loved. He had lived well



abroad, with 'a few glasses of Port wine after dinner' at Malta, he had felt the need of stimulants to keep up his rôle of wonderful talker. He had been too long away from loving care. There is no evidence about opiates, but he must have continued to take them in illness. For the next four years, however, it was still not opium, it was brandy which was the main trouble, as far, at any rate, as the Wordsworths seem to have been aware.

There was a great mental worry. Seven years before, on Coleridge's return from Germany, he had dashed home, all love and eagerness. Now he could not bear it. He had another good reason for spending the first weeks in London. He had to obtain some journalistic work. He had lost all his foreign earnings, his letters of credit at Naples and at Trieste. But chiefly he could not face 'domesticating with Mrs. Coleridge'. He wrote to tell the Wordsworths so—to their dismay. They must for the moment have persuaded him otherwise, for a series of letters written to his wife in late September and early October envisage their living together either in London or at Keswick. Wordsworth would have gone up to London to see him but was afraid of finding he had already left for the North. The Wordsworths were due at Coleorton before the end of October: the merest politeness required them to be there a few days before the Beaumonts left. They left Grasmere as late as possible for Kendal, where they would stay the night before taking the coach south. Sarah Hutchinson came from Penrith to spend the night with them. They found her at Kendal with a letter from Coleridge written from Penrith half an hour

after she had left there. He had learnt that she had gone to Kendal and why. He *could* not come to Kendal just to see his friends depart. A hurried messenger was sent to Keswick to say they would delay their departure, but Coleridge had changed his mind. About seven in the evening a message was received from him from an inn in Kendal. 'We all went thither to him and never never did I feel such a shock.'

It will be convenient at this point to state briefly where and how the two friends spent the next four years, from October 1806 to October 1810. They were the last years of real friendship, but years in which the friendship was subject to increasing strains. The famous quarrel between Wordsworth and Coleridge was unexpected, but it was not sudden.

From Kendal Coleridge went to Keswick and the Wordsworths to Coleorton, where Coleridge joined them in December. They all stayed there till April when they went to London. In May Wordsworth was back at Coleorton and in July he returned to Grasmere. There, except for a few short visits including one to London in February and March 1808 to see Coleridge and another of about a month to Coleorton in July-August 1810, he remained for the rest of the period in question. There was one big change. At the end of May 1808 the family at last moved from the Town-end cottage to Allan Bank, a larger house, newly built and rented by Wordsworth from its owner. There they had adequate houseroom not only for themselves but for Coleridge.

Coleridge's movements are more complicated. At



about the same time as Wordsworth returned to Coleorton, Coleridge went to Bristol. Then from 6 June to the middle of September he was at Stowey with Poole. His wife was there and in Bristol, they having planned to go to Ottery and explain their domestic situation to Coleridge's family. The plan did not materialize, chiefly owing to lack of enthusiasm for it at Ottery. Mrs. Coleridge returned to Keswick, and on 23 November 1807 Coleridge was back in London with plans for lecturing. In London, with two visits to Bristol, he stayed till June, when he visited the Clarksons at Bury St. Edmunds. He lectured in London irregularly from January to May. In August 1808 he took up his new quarters, with a 'parlour', at Allan Bank. On 5 September he went for a few days to Greta Hall. From 12 February to 13<sup>1</sup> June 1809 he was away at Penrith, Keswick, Appleby and other places making arrangements for his new periodical *The Friend*. Then from June 1809 to May 1810 he was again at Allan Bank. In May he went to Keswick and stayed there till he left for London late in October 1810 in company with Basil Montagu.

Coleridge's relations with his wife were eventually settled more or less as he wanted. The Wordsworths after seeing him came to the conclusion that separation was the lesser evil. There was no financial difficulty. She would have the Wedgwood annuity as during his absence. During that absence the Southey and Mrs. Lovell, the widowed sister-in-law, had come to live at Greta Hall. Southey, who was doing quite well, would

<sup>1</sup> Not 14 June as usually stated.

continue to pay at least his share of expenses. It may have been the presence of the two sisters-in-law, whom Coleridge disliked, that finally settled him against 'domesticating with Mrs Coleridge', for whom he felt affection and respect, only regretting the proved incompatibility. His plan was that they should separate by consent, that he should have the boys and be responsible for their education but that they should spend their holidays with their mother in the same way as if they had been at a boarding school, and that the separation should be made in such a spirit that he would 'be able to visit her in a friendly way'. For seven bitter weeks of November and December 1806 the Coleridges fought their battle. Mrs. Coleridge's main objection was that people would 'talk', but the more 'outrageous' she became the more Coleridge felt he must not yield. Finally, thinking she had agreed, he departed to Coleorton taking Hartley with him but leaving the younger boy, Derwent, behind with his mother, perhaps because the Wordsworth children had whooping cough. Ten-year-old Hartley went up to London with them all in April and had a grand time. He went with his father to Bristol, but not back to London for the winter. On Wednesday 4 November 1807 Dorothy at Grasmere 'heard a tumult in the house and Mary shouted . . . guess my surprise and joy at seeing Hartley skipping about the room. His Mother and Derwent and Sara were at the door in a chaise, and a Mr. de Quincey a young Oxonian . . . he found out Coleridge and is come for a week purposely to see William.' The boys stayed in the north. When



Coleridge settled in at Allan Bank they boarded at a school at Ambleside and were at Allan Bank on Saturdays and Sundays. The Wordsworths had at first dreaded the obloquy of harbouring Coleridge so near his wife, but in fact the separation, though less formal than had been intended, worked best when all were fairly near. All were now on good terms and visits could be exchanged. The rift which was widening was not that between Coleridge and his wife, but that between Coleridge and Wordsworth.

When Wordsworth spent those three sad days in October 1806 at Kendal with Coleridge, he already had in the press the two volumes of poems published in 1807, that magnificent collection which includes the *Ode*, the harvest of the Scotch tour, the *Sonnets dedicated to Liberty*, *Ode to Duty*, *The Happy Warrior* and so much else. On 16 November Dorothy reported 'William has written two other poems, which you will see when they are printed.' There can be no doubt that one of these was *A Complaint*.

There is a change—and I am poor;  
Your Love hath been, nor long ago,  
A Fountain at my fond Heart's door,  
Whose only business was to flow;  
And flow it did; not taking heed  
Of its own bounty, or my need.

What happy moments did I count!  
Bless'd was I then all bliss above!  
Now, for this consecrated Fount  
Of murmuring, sparkling, living love,  
What have I? shall I dare to tell?  
A comfortless, and hidden WELL.

A Well of love—it may be deep—  
I trust it is, and never dry :  
What matter? if the Waters sleep  
In silence and obscurity.  
—Such change, and at the very door  
Of my fond Heart, hath made me poor.

It was a melancholy comment on the last lines of *The Pains of Sleep*, an ironic comment on the twenty-eight months of anxiety about and longing for Coleridge abroad.

The trouble can be divided into two stages, before and after the move to Allan Bank. One thing noticed at Kendal can be gathered from a letter of Dorothy's to Lady Beaumont written two days before Coleridge arrived at Coleorton—'As to drinking brandy, I hope he has already given over that practice; but *here* . . . we shall not have any set before him, and we should be very loath to comply with his request if he were to ask for it. There may be some danger in the strong beer, which he used formerly to like, but I think, if he is not inclined to manage himself, *we* can manage him, and he will take no harm, while he has not the temptations which variety of company leads him into of taking stimulants to keep him in spirits while he is talking.' That euphemism of managing himself was often to be used by Coleridge's friends. Five weeks later Coleridge 'does not take such strong stimulants as he did, but I fear he will never be able to leave them off entirely. He drinks ale at night and mid-morning and dinner-time.' The months at Coleorton were not too bad though 'we had long experience at Coleorton that it



was not in our power to make him happy'. There were spring rambles, but, besides keeping Coleridge sober, his friends had also to do their best to get him to write the most necessary letters. And in the middle of February came a letter from Mrs. Coleridge 'who, poor woman! is almost frantic' on the separation question. 'Coleridge has determined to make his home with us; but *where?*' In spite of the difficulties the Wordsworths did not for a moment think of denying Coleridge's wish.

The months spent by Coleridge at Bristol and Stowey did further damage to the friendship. 'Coleridge has never written to us', wrote Dorothy from Grasmere in November, 'and we have given over writing to him, for what is the use of it? We believe he has not opened one of our letters. Poor soul! he is sadly to be pitied. I fear all resolution and strength of mind have utterly deserted him. . . . I am almost afraid to wish him here, fearing that we may be of no service to him.' Two letters came in November, and interest was aroused in the projected London lectures on the Principles of Poetry. De Quincey was to report them. The first was delivered on 15 January 1808, but they were not always given on the days announced. The Royal Institution in Albemarle Street can seldom have been so badly treated. Coleridge was ill. The Wordsworths were alarmed. 'We never hear anything directly; and nothing has reached us but one distressing detail of illness after another; and I fear it will never be otherwise; for setting aside that he takes no care to guard against wet or cold, I have no doubt that he

continues the practice of taking opiates as much as ever.' Even now the illness came first and the opium afterwards. On 23 February Wordsworth left home for London. 'Coleridge himself thinks that he *cannot* live many months': he was to trouble his friends often in this way, though no doubt he believed it.

Wordsworth found that his journey was not so necessary as all that. However 'I heard Coleridge lecture twice, and he seemed to give great satisfaction; but he was not in spirits, and suffered much during the course of the week, both in body and mind.' Wordsworth had taken the opportunity of bringing with him, with a view to publication, a new long poem, now known as *The White Doe of Rylstone*. When in London he decided not to publish since it would only add to the unpopularity of his poetry. He could, however, get a hundred guineas for it from Longman, and his wife and sister were horrified at losing much needed money—'New House! new furniture! such a large family! two servants and little Sally! we *cannot* go on so another half-year.' Wordsworth went home leaving the question unsettled and the manuscript with Coleridge. Coleridge and Lamb talked it over and suggested changes before publication. Wordsworth gladly accepted the excuse to postpone publication, which in the end waited till 1815. Coleridge the critic was as much alive as ever, but Wordsworth the poet was in danger from Wordsworth the family man. He gained by this visit to Coleridge, whom he had not seen for nearly ten months. Coleridge 'is a wonderful creature', wrote Dorothy after William's return,



'pouring out such treasures of thought and knowledge almost, we may say, without premeditation, and in language so eloquent'.

Nevertheless the rift in the friendship was widening. A month later in a very long letter, which only exists in drafts and was perhaps never sent, Wordsworth set out to reply to accusations he had received from Coleridge. He had been accused of taking part against Coleridge with those who were not Coleridge's friends and of trying to poison Sarah Hutchinson's mind against him. 'There is more than one sentence in your letter which I blushed to read, and which you yourself would have been unable to write, could never have thought of writing, nay, the matter of which could never even have passed through your mind, had you not acquired a habit, which I think a very pernicious one, of giving by voice and pen to your most lawless thoughts, and to your wildest fancies, an external existence; thus furnishing the bad Soul as well as the Good with an ever ready Companion and Encourager; and finding by insensible reconciliation fair and attractive bosom-inmates in productions from which you ought to have recoiled as monsters.'

They were all used to psychological analysis. Coleridge had done it to Mrs. Coleridge. It was part of Wordsworth's poetic theory and practice. Complete mutual frankness had been part of the glory of the great years, but in those years there had been so much to admire. If Coleridge read these words, they may not have hurt too much. Yet one rather hopes that, if the letter was sent, it was not read, great though the

provocation was. One can argue too closely with a friend who is sick in mind as well as body.

In any case Coleridge came to Allan Bank. It had never been lived in before. Its smoking chimneys have become famous. It was no ordinary smokiness. Rooms became uninhabitable. They had for a week at a time to do without a kitchen fire. Dorothy 'with a candle in my hand, stumbled over a chair, unable to see it'. Soot settled everywhere. It was not the best atmosphere in which to cope with a difficult housemate. Yet the good Wordsworths and Sarah Hutchinson did their best, and they do seem to have been a most remarkably good-tempered family. In October 1808 Coleridge was 'in tolerable health and better spirits than I have known him to possess for some time'. He was making his plans for a new periodical, *The Friend*. Wordsworth sent off prospectuses and wrote to acquaintances about it. Wordsworth at the same time was busy with his pamphlet on the Convention of Cintra. Politics, home and foreign, were interesting him more and more. His views and Coleridge's were much the same; Coleridge provided a paragraph or two for the essays contributed by Wordsworth to the *London Courier*. In December Coleridge was still 'well and in good spirits'. Nevertheless Dorothy was anxious about him. He was often not well enough to get up in the morning, though by evening he was 'cheerful and comfortable'. It does not appear that Dorothy connected this with laudanum from which, in fact, Coleridge was at this time trying to free himself. 'A very painful Effort of moral Courage has been remunerated by Tranquillity—



by Ease from the Sting of Self-disapprobation. I have done more for the last 10 weeks than I had done for three years before' (to Humphry Davy, 7 December 1808).

They got satisfactorily into the new year. In February it was William who was having 'those dreadful headaches (which, you know, he in his gloomy way calls apoplectic)'. So Dorothy who, in the same letter, reports that Coleridge had left them on business about the forthcoming *Friend*. The business, for which Coleridge was not very competent, concerned the printing and publishing of his new weekly in Penrith and the procuring for it of 'stamped paper' as required by law, i.e. of sheets die-stamped to show that for each the tax of threepence halfpenny had been paid. The mere procuring that the necessary paper should be sent on time to a small and remote town was not easy, and, of course, it added considerably to the capital outlay. Coleridge was never very far away from Grasmere and disquieting news about him arrived from time to time. At other houses he did not get up till near dinner-time (about 3 p.m.). The Wordsworths were anxious lest 'fatigue, bad accommodation etc., etc., should disarrange his body or mind'. Sometimes they heard nothing of or from him, which was equally disquieting. At the end of March<sup>1</sup> 1809 Wordsworth 'cannot say that Coleridge has been managing himself well', and fears *The Friend* (which had not yet started) may not last long. In April Coleridge 'writes in bad

<sup>1</sup> Towards the end of March Coleridge had mumps which did not help matters.

spirits' and Dorothy has no hope. On 1 May 'we are indeed now a quiet family, wanting Sissy and, above all, Coleridge; who though not noisy in himself makes a bustle in the house'. She now has 'better hopes of him', but soon after they heard he had been taken ill again. Wordsworth wrote urging 'resolution, self-denial, and well-regulated conditions of feeling' as opposed to 'Doctors' stuff' which 'has been one of your greatest curses; and, of course, of ours through you'. At the end of the month 'Of the Friend and Coleridge I hear nothing, and am sorry to say I hope nothing.' He told Poole it was impossible that Coleridge would carry on with his periodical essay and it would be better if it never started. He 'neither will nor can execute any thing of important benefit either to himself his family or mankind'. It was, however, no good 'to advise him to drop his work, he would immediately ascribe the failure to the damp thrown upon his spirits by this interference'.

*The Friend* did at last appear, the first number on Thursday 1 June; the second on 8 June announced a longer interval which in fact extended to 10 August. On Tuesday 13 June at ten in the morning Coleridge reappeared at Allan Bank. He had started the morning before and had walked the hard way. We know that there had been some pretty bad 'managing' at Penrith, but now he was a reformed character. He had spent a week with Wilkinson (whose spade Wordsworth immortalized) where he 'drank no spirits'. He was getting up at six in the morning. He had only been back one day, but 'I must tell you that he has had no



liquor but ale since he returned; but indeed while he has been with us he has seldom had any kind of spirits except in water gruel, which he was always fond of taking when he had a pain in his Bowels.'

Wordsworth felt he had been mistaken. He now had 'more favourable hopes of his exerting himself steadily than I ever have had at any other period of this business'. All the rest of *The Friend's* twenty-eight numbers were produced at Allan Bank. Wordsworth made some important contributions, but most of the contents were dictated by Coleridge to Sarah Hutchinson. Her manuscript survives. Number 4 came out on 7 September and after that, except for 2 November, it is dated regularly every Thursday till that of 11 January 1810, which is a 'supernumerary Essay', not numbered though the pagination is continuous. The twenty-second number, No. 21, came out on 25 January. Then it was regular till 1 March, and the last number (not announced or intended as the last) came out on 15 March. Coleridge is reported as well and busy for several months. Not till the end of February do we hear that his 'spirits have been irregular of late'. The finances of *The Friend* were working out badly. It consisted of one sheet folded into a large octavo and cost a shilling, which meant eightpence-halfpenny to cover cost of production. Some of those to whom it was sent denied that they had promised to subscribe, and the business arrangements for collecting the subscriptions were fantastically inadequate. Not unnaturally Coleridge was upset, but he was persuaded to continue.

In March Sarah Hutchinson left her sister's household to join one of her brothers in Wales. *The Friend* dried up. Four weeks after the last issue Dorothy has no hope of Coleridge. 'If he were not under our roof, he would be just as much the slave of stimulants as ever; and his whole time and thoughts, (except when he is reading and he reads a great deal), are employed in deceiving himself, and seeking to deceive others. . . . Coleridge is just come down stairs,  $\frac{1}{2}$  past 12 o'clock. He is in great spirits and says to me that he is going to set to work in good earnest . . . do not think that it is his love for Sara which has stopped him in his work . . . his love for her is no more than a fanciful dream. Otherwise he would prove it by a desire to make her happy. No! He likes to have her about him as his own, as one devoted to him, but when she stood in the way of other gratifications it was all over . . . *burn* this letter.' On the finest day he did not go out—'he never leaves his own parlour except at dinner and tea, and sometimes supper, and then he always seems impatient to get back to his solitude. He goes the moment his food is swallowed. Sometimes he does not speak a word.'

Hot friends had cooled indeed. In May Coleridge left the Wordsworths' house for Keswick. In October he left Keswick for London.

The love and long-suffering of Wordsworth are patent. It was Coleridge who at last broke them down. The shock felt at Kendal went on and on for four years. Yet had Coleridge found no change from the Wordsworth of 1804? We must not stress too much the headmasterliness of some of the passages quoted



from Wordsworth's letters. All his prose is stiff compared with Coleridge's or Dorothy's. But could there be the same unreprieved freedom at Coleorton or Allan Bank as at Alfoxden or Town-end? There you could get up as late as you liked, you arrived at any hour you liked, William might sit in his shirt-sleeves refusing to eat his breakfast till he had finished a poem. Dorothy never troubled about not knowing when she could make a bed. You might start off at a moment's notice on some wonderful expedition. With quietly competent Mary 'to warn, to comfort, and command' all that had gone. At Coleorton they were in the house of another man, a man of local importance. Appearances had to be kept up. Two of the household were detailed for Church each Sunday morning. Wordsworth was becoming respectable. For all his sympathy with Benjamin of *The Waggoner* (that most delightful poem) he stood by *Resolution and Independence* and the *Ode to Duty*. In Coleridge's character the wayward element, but in Wordsworth's the orderly, was predominating more and more. The difference between them at this time is nicely illustrated by their methods of work as related by Dorothy to Lady Beaumont on 28 February 1810. For Coleridge 'there have been weeks and weeks when he has not composed a line . . . he either does a great deal or nothing at all. . . . He has written a whole *Friend* more than once in two days': but William 'seldom writes less than fifty lines every day' (of *The Recluse*). One understands the comparative dullness of the second half of *The Excursion*.

Wordsworth was working too steadily for a man

of his imaginative type. Coleridge was working too erratically for the editor and, for the most part, author of a weekly periodical. From the original *Friend* one can almost see him at work. *The Friend*, as 're-printed' in 1818 and subsequently, is a different production. Some of the original is omitted because it had already been reprinted in 1817 in *Sibylline Leaves* or *Biographia Literaria*, much is added, all is rearranged. No. 25 (22 February 1810), now known as Wordsworth's first *Essay on Epitaphs* was not reprinted because it had been added as a note to *The Excursion* in 1814. A fair amount of Wordsworth's poetry, published or unpublished, was quoted in *The Friend*, usually over his name or initials, including about half a dozen sonnets and *The Prelude* passage on skating which is preceded by 'Wisdom and spirit of the universe!' A young neighbour John Wilson, better known as 'Christopher North', wrote the greater part of No. 17 in the form of a letter from Mathetes (learner) asking for *The Friend's* guidance among moral and intellectual difficulties. The rest of No. 17 and all but the last page of No. 20 consist of a reply which Wordsworth wrote. It contains the famous passage about the schoolboy's blown-out candle, which 'fades and revives . . . continues to shine with an endurance which in its apparent weakness is a mystery . . . it is the life of a venerated parent, of a beloved brother or sister, or of an aged domestic. . . . This is nature teaching seriously and sweetly through the affections.' It is, of course, autobiographical, it shows us the latent poet in the child Wordsworth, it can easily be dismissed



as mere nonsense, but in fact it gets near to the heart of imaginative symbolism and therefore of imaginative life.

Coleridge stated in the opening number that the object of *The Friend* was 'to refer men to *Principles* in all things'. His search for the principle is evident in everything he wrote. He is soon discussing 'the Communication of Truth and the Rightful Liberty of the Press in connection with it'. This leads through 'the Principles of Political Philosophy', and after an 'Interlude' mainly about Luther, to an essay 'On the Grounds of Government as laid exclusively in the Pure Reason, or a Statement and Critique of the Third System of Political Philosophy, viz. The Theory of Rousseau and the French Economists'. We go on to 'the Errors of Party Spirit: or Extremes Meet'. This finishes early in No. 11 (26 October 1809), which is filled up with a letter to 'R.L.' about *The Friend*, with sonnets of Wordsworth's, with two 'Specimens of Rabbinical Wisdom' and finally with Coleridge's own *Hymn Before Sun-rise*. No. 12 is concerned with 'the Vulgar Errors respecting Taxes and Taxation', but No. 13 contains a short story about one Maria Schöning which Dorothy found 'beautifully told; but . . . there is something so horrid in it that I cannot bear to think of the story'. Most of Nos. 14, 16 and 18 consists of 'Satyrane's Letters' about the visit to Germany in 1798-9, which were reprinted in *Biographia Literaria*. No. 15 returns to political philosophy, 17 and 20 contain the letter of and reply to Mathetes, 19 is miscellaneous. The 'supplementary' number of

11 January 1810 is mostly addressed to the subscribers, who were not all subscribing, and in No. 21 with a 'Prefatory Observation on Modern Biography' we get the key to what was mainly in Coleridge's mind during the last two months of *The Friend*. His friend and patron at Malta, Sir Alexander Ball, had recently died. Coleridge writes most interestingly about him and Malta and the war in the Mediterranean in general. It is a great pity that he did not bring out one more number to finish his 'Sketches and Fragments of the Life and Character of the Late Admiral Sir Alexander Ball'. Nor should his digression on Nelson be forgotten:

This strong attachment of the heroic admiral to his fleet, faithfully repaid by an equal attachment on their part to their admiral, had no little influence in attuning their hearts to each other; and when he died, it seemed as if no man was a stranger to another; for all were made acquaintances by the rights of a common anguish. In the fleet itself, many a private quarrel was forgotten, no more to be remembered; many, who had been alienated, became once more good friends; yea, many a one was reconciled to his very enemy, and loved and (as it were) thanked him for the bitterness of his grief, as if it had been an act of consolation to himself in an intercourse of private sympathy. The tidings arrived at Naples on the day that I returned to that city from Calabria;<sup>1</sup> and never can I forget the sorrow and consternation that lay on every countenance.

In the production of *The Friend* there were some

<sup>1</sup> He had gone presumably to some port to take passage for Trieste (see p. 147). The news of Ulm (19 October 1805) may have turned him back. Trafalgar was on 21 October.



elements of the old collaboration between Wordsworth and Coleridge, not the old glad collaboration, for Wordsworth was now standing by as an anxious and gloomy schoolmaster, Coleridge in his weakness could only get on if fussed over by Sarah Hutchinson. Success was greater than had been expected by the Wordsworths, but the strain on both sides was considerable. Everyone was relieved when Coleridge went to Keswick in May, though all that was intended was a short visit while Mary Wordsworth had her fifth baby. He spent an idle summer and decided to go to London for the winter and to get work. Basil Montagu with his third wife was at Grasmere, would take him there and give him a home to begin with.

Wordsworth, rightly and wrongly, warned Montagu of Coleridge's failings as a visitor—rightly, since Montagu was also an old friend (though in a different class) and it must have seemed only decent to put him on his guard—wrongly, because Montagu would have found out in any case and because Coleridge was an old and dear friend above all friends, was exceedingly sensitive and now needed every possible consideration that imaginative love could suggest. Wordsworth should not have spoken in candid blame of Coleridge except to one of his own family who could be trusted not to repeat his words in unkindness. Within a week Montagu had been provoked and had repeated them. This was the beginning of the famous quarrel. Coleridge was cut to the heart—but Wordsworth knew nothing about it. He was by now quite used to not hearing from Coleridge. Dorothy went further. 'For

*ached to the heart.*

my part', she wrote to Mrs. Clarkson on 11<sup>1</sup> November 1810, 'I am hopeless of him, and I dismiss him as much as possible from my thoughts.'

There is an element of comedy as well as of tragedy in a one-sided quarrel. Coleridge brooded over it all the winter and occasionally told someone that Wordsworth had thrown him over. Someone, probably Mrs. Montagu, spread the story of a quarrel. By May the news reached Grasmere in the form, as indignantly reported by Dorothy, that 'Coleridge has been driven to madness by Wordsworth's cruel or unjust conduct towards him.' What had really happened, according to Dorothy, was that William had advised Montagu that it would be better for Coleridge not to live in his house but 'to have lodgings near him. William intended giving C. advice to the same effect; but he had no opportunity of talking with him when C. passed through Grasmere on his way to London.'

Coleridge, of course, had left Montagu's house; he had been at work on *The Courier* newspaper, and in the next winter (18 November 1811–27 January 1812) he gave a course of lectures on 'Shakespeare and Milton, in illustration of the Principles of Poetry, and their Application as Grounds of Criticism to the most popular Works of later English Poets, those of the Living included'—he did not get to 'the living'. Wordsworth treated the quarrel as a minor misunderstanding which would blow over. He did not dash up

<sup>1</sup> Misdated '12th'. It is always well to check Dorothy's day of the week, for which she can be trusted, with the day of the month, for which she cannot.



to London to put things right. Perhaps he had had enough of that in the spring of 1808. In 1811 he was moving house from smoky Allan Bank to the parsonage at Grasmere. In February 1812 Coleridge came north (for the last time) to wind up the business end of *The Friend*. From Kendal he drove to Ambleside, collected his boys from their school and drove through Grasmere to Keswick. He did not stop in Grasmere. He was several weeks at Keswick and Penrith. The two men did not meet. Coleridge was back in London by mid-April. Wordsworth also had occasion to go to London where he and his wife stayed in Grosvenor Square with Sir George Beaumont. Coleridge, not knowing this, asked his wife to ask Southey to obtain from Wordsworth the rest of his essays on epitaphs—a delicate business in the circumstances. However, through the epitaphs reconciliation was effected, once it was realized by Wordsworth and Coleridge and their friends that the opportunity had come.

It was not easy after more than a year and a half to be sure exactly what Wordsworth had said to Montagu, what Montagu had said Wordsworth had said, or what Coleridge thought Montagu had said Wordsworth had said. In Coleridge's mind it had grown to Wordsworth's having commissioned Montagu to tell him that he had been 'a rotten drunkard' and rotting out his entrails by intemperance, and had been 'an absolute nuisance' in Wordsworth's family. So dangerous it is to give a friendly word of caution. Poor Coleridge's self-accusations now mingled with Montagu's unkind and ill-judged repetition, and perhaps

exaggeration, of whatever Wordsworth had said. The first steps towards a reconciliation were not easy. A failure would be final. Wordsworth approached Lamb as a possible intermediary. There was a brisk and dangerous correspondence which might have ended in a fiasco but for the chance that Coleridge told his story to a friend of the Clarksons, Henry Crabb Robinson. A new mind with a new approach was successful. What Wordsworth had really said was not more than Coleridge could bear. He had given no commission to Montagu, he had not used the offensive words, he could not withdraw what he had actually said to Montagu but he would not have said even that if he had known Montagu would repeat it.

Coleridge was satisfied. They met more than once. They went for a walk to Hampstead. Peace was restored. Friendship had a chance to revive. Love lay dying.



## Chapter Nine

### TWO OLD GENTLEMEN

‘I have been rambling on the Continent with my Daughter and Mr. Coleridge’

WHEN, in May 1812, the two walked peaceably to Hampstead, Wordsworth was forty-two, Coleridge not yet forty. No one would have called either of them young. Grief, sickness and intemperance had aged and bloated Coleridge. Wordsworth was one of those who naturally age early: the tendency had been accentuated for several years by steady application to creative work though the creative power was wilting. Both had their finest work behind them though much of it was still unpublished. Of what was still unwritten it is safe to say that Coleridge’s prose is more important than Wordsworth’s verse, but how much of Coleridge’s prose was already in his mind and had merely to be poured out is another question. How much Wordsworth’s later work suffered, directly and indirectly, from his recurrent eye-trouble is also a question not always accorded the importance it deserves.<sup>1</sup>

Coleridge and Wordsworth had in the end failed one another. The glad confident morning of Alfoxden and the bright, if chequered, noon of Town-end faded into a weeping afternoon and a long grey evening. Wordsworth had desperately missed Coleridge during

<sup>1</sup> See E. C. Batho, *The Later Wordsworth*, pp. 318–36.

his absences. If only Coleridge were with him, he would get on famously. Yet Coleridge's influence had not been all to the good. His insistence on the grand philosophical poem, his comparative disdain for short pieces, was a mistake. Yet once his supply and stimulus were withdrawn, Wordsworth was starved. He could not even lay up much treasure for himself. He was one 'not used to make A present joy the matter of my Song' (there were, of course, notable exceptions) but rather to draw on 'hiding-places ten years deep'. His turgid commonplaces after Waterloo reveal, therefore, a weakness in his thinking since Trafalgar, just as his *Thought of a Briton on the Subjugation of Switzerland* goes back with depth and simplicity to an event that had happened years before.

Coleridge failed Wordsworth because he failed himself. Worse than his physical pains, worse than his domestic infelicity was his torturing sense of guilt for wasted talents. 'For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required.' One thing was not given to Coleridge, self-control without submission to an outside authority and in particular that power of temporary canalization and control of the intellect without which large results are impossible. So his very admiration for Wordsworth turned, in his worst moments, to a fevered jealousy, though it never affected his critical acumen. What inevitable doom fell on him in Malta or Italy we do not know, but from the time of his return his mind was in no healthy state. He could give Wordsworth little: his need was to receive. The Coleridge who listened with such throng-



ing emotions to the 'Growth of a Poet's Mind' was no longer the Coleridge of that poem. For nearly four years, as we have seen, Wordsworth did his best to help and to restore. His failure was due to a fundamental difference between the two men. Wordsworth, except when an uprush of the imagination swept away all the merely mundane, was essentially moral and a moralist: Coleridge was sinful, suffering and religious. If only Coleridge had written an *Ode to Duty*, and Wordsworth had not!

Yet Wordsworth was for years so near the heart of things and has given us so much (and Coleridge less in quantity but not in quality) that there seems an ungraciousness in the perennial complaint about his decline. He did not, like Shakespeare, retire and die when he had finished: he went on, like Ben Jonson, to 'dotages', the dotages of one who has once been great. The reason for the complaint is, perhaps, that it was in his decline that Wordsworth obtained full recognition and popularity and that that recognition was partly based on his later and inferior work. We have changed all that—ever since, nearly sixty years ago, Emile Legouis wrote on *La Jeunesse de William Wordsworth*. Legouis did what Matthew Arnold in 1879 had failed to do: he set us looking for Wordsworth's power at its beginnings. Yet Matthew Arnold was right in stressing power. 'Wordsworth's poetry is great because of the extraordinary power with which Wordsworth feels the joy offered to us in nature, the joy offered to us in the simple primary affections and duties; and because of the extraordinary power with which . . . he shows

us this joy, and renders it so as to make us share it.' Yes, but there is much more to Wordsworth than that. Joy is not enough. There must be Vision also:

The types and symbols of Eternity,  
Of first and last, and midst, and without end.

Wordsworth and Coleridge both sometimes attained the Vision which with Blake was habitual.

Blake in South Molton Street was 'hid', but Wordsworth and Coleridge were now well known. Next winter, on 23 January 1813, Coleridge's tragedy *Osorio*, revised as *Remorse*, was performed at Drury Lane and ran for twenty nights. Financially this was just as well, since Josiah Wedgwood had now withdrawn his half of the £150 annuity. Tom Wedgwood had died in 1805, but his half was secured by his will. This winter, also, Coleridge gave his fourth course of London lectures. He talked of coming to Keswick or Grasmere, but did not come—not even when Wordsworth's little boy, Thomas, died. He was mostly in London, but the autumn of 1813 found him at Bristol lecturing on Shakespeare, Milton and Education. Morally he was in a bad way. The opium craving had taken hold of him, though he gave more lectures on Milton in the spring of 1814. At Bristol he renewed the old friendship with Cottle, who had not seen him since 1807 and was shocked at what he now saw. Opium and brandy were using up all Coleridge's money. Coleridge could not cure himself and, rightly, thought that he ought to be under permanent medical supervision. His old and trusted adviser Dr. Beddoes

1.6.2 Galilei



had died at the end of 1808: otherwise something might have been arranged sooner than it was. Meanwhile, on 1 August 1814, *Remorse* was produced at Bristol, and for a Bristol paper Coleridge wrote some essays on æsthetics. He moved to Ashley near Bath and then to Calne in Wiltshire, where he spent the whole of 1815, had many friends, did a good deal of the literary work which ultimately resulted in *Sibylline Leaves* and *Biographia Literaria*, and was the slave of opium. At the end of March 1816 he returned to London. A new doctor Joseph Adams advised that very medical supervision for which Coleridge himself had longed and sent him to Dr. James Gillman at Highgate. On 15 April 1816 Coleridge came to live with Gillman for a month: his stay lasted for more than eighteen years, though not in the same house: Gillman moved to another Highgate house in 1823. There was still a good deal of the old and varied illnesses, including some night screaming, but Coleridge and Gillman together conquered his two intemperances. In the second house he had a large and pleasant upstairs study-bedroom and a 'parlour' downstairs. He settled down at last in 1821, to the Great Work, in which another doctor, J. H. Green, took an immense interest. To Green much of it was dictated, but it never achieved coherent and systematic form. From Highgate Coleridge emerged to lecture and see his friends. After a while old friends and new took to calling on him at Highgate. Dr. Gillman was not always paid the money due to him, but he was happy in reflected glory and in the consciousness of having done all that could be done to save a great man.

Wordsworth meanwhile had settled down to solid success, though 1812 had seen the death not only of little Thomas but, almost immediately on the reconciliation with Coleridge, of little Catherine—a loss recorded in the pathetic sonnet ‘Surprised by joy’. Next year came the move from Grasmere parsonage to Rydal Mount, Wordsworth’s home for the rest of his life. At the same time Wordsworth received an important piece of official patronage, an Inland Revenue post, that of Distributor of Stamps for Westmorland and part of Cumberland, including Penrith: it was extended to include Maryport, Cockermouth and Workington in 1820 and Carlisle in 1831—extensions which imply that his London superiors had confidence in him. This post, which political opponents called a sinecure in 1818, has been commonly misunderstood by Wordsworth’s biographers. It was not a sinecure, nor was the work done by his clerk, John Carter, more than an assistant would normally perform. It was not, of course, a full-time appointment, but it carried with it full-time responsibility and the actual work was considerable.

The stamps were revenue stamps in constant demand by lawyers and others. It would have been a great help to Coleridge in his difficulties over getting stamped paper for *The Friend* in 1809 if Wordsworth had then been Distributor. In each small town there was a distributing office, sometimes in a shop, kept by a sub-distributor. It is not clear how much Wordsworth, as head distributor, was paid, but it seems to have been partly by salary and partly by commission. The salary



was burdened, according to the good old English pension system, by a life payment of £100 a year to his predecessor. Clerical expenses also came out of the salary, and the rises in Carter's salary may have balanced the extra £100 Wordsworth got when his predecessor, Wilkin, died. At any rate in sixteen years Carter's salary had trebled. The clerical work was mostly done at Wordsworth's own house ('there is nothing to-night but stamp office letters', wrote Dorothy, 18 February 1815). The Distributor had to make periodic rounds of the sub-distributors' offices and make fairly long stays in their towns at his own expense. He was able to claim the cost of postage<sup>1</sup> (postage inwards, of course), though some official letters would presumably be franked.

The emoluments were not great, but they made all the difference to a Wordsworth who in 1805 had returned his and his wife's joint incomes for income-tax purposes as £69 exclusive of 'Lord Lowther's money and that which poor John owed me'. Dorothy reckoned that he would not make more than £100 the first year, though that would go up with an expected increase in the sale of stamps. The amount of work varied. The modern conception of full time and fixed hours hardly existed. There was a job to be done: sometimes it meant being very busy, sometimes not. Wordsworth naturally hoped at the beginning that, once he had learnt the ropes and got everything in order, there would be a

<sup>1</sup> Or perhaps only five per cent. of it. 'There is no allowance for extra expenses except 1s. in the 20s. for carriage' (Dorothy, 10 August 1813).

simple routine which would run itself. 'Afterwards all will be easy, little for him to do', wrote Dorothy in September 1813. Others have suffered from similar delusions. John Carter was part time too, for he was also gardener at Rydal Mount. His character is not without interest: it includes 'unprincipled conduct' with 'Mary Anne' (Dorothy, 8 August 1820), an abortive ambition to be ordained (Mary Wordsworth, 9 December 1824) and much praise and regard by William. He was a good clerk. A secretary-governed age like the present should be the last to grudge Wordsworth his help, especially as Carter often had to hold the fort while Wordsworth went on his rounds (Wordsworth, 13 March 1829). In the same letter Wordsworth writes 'since I held the Stamps, 24 hours have not elapsed, save once, for a very few days, without myself or one of my nearest connections being present'. So, if Wordsworth was away from home, one of his family had to deputize for him: no Assistant-Distributor was provided.

How far the work was both a tie and a mental preoccupation is suggested by many passages in de Selincourt's edition of the *Letters*,<sup>1</sup> e.g. 'William is at Penrith on Stamp business. Till the end of this month he will be entirely engaged with it' (Dorothy, first week of September 1813), and 'The Stamp Office will require my presence from about the 15th till the 20th of July' (William, 23 May 1816). In January 1817 the sub-distributor at Kirkby Lonsdale, a shopkeeper, became bankrupt. Wordsworth might have had to

<sup>1</sup> There are about forty references to the distributorship.



make up £300, and only 'after a long search' he found 'the Legacy Receipts to a large amount . . . in an obscure part' of the sub-distributor's house. On 2 February 1818 we find him writing to Kingston (the official at the London Stamp Office who made Lamb laugh so at Haydon's 'immortal dinner' on 28 December 1817 but who became quite a friend of Wordsworth's) explaining that the 'Proprietor of the Kendal Coach' was responsible for the delay in Wordsworth's 'Quarterly and Annual Accounts' reaching London. From Paris on 14 October 1820, towards the end of that year's Continental tour, Dorothy writes that William and Mary 'will be very anxious to get home . . . because of the stamp office'. He had to spend time on getting information about candidates for vacant sub-distributorships. The emoluments began to diminish. On 13 March 1829 Wordsworth complains of 'a further Reduction in our allowance. . . . The trouble of the office has been encreased since I entered upon it, incalculably; and more work and less pay, prolonged service and diminished salary is surely the Reverse of a dictate of natural justice.' So it went on. However, Willy, his youngest son, became sub-distributor for Carlisle, and in 1842 succeeded his father as Distributor.

The post was very suitable for the country lawyer's son, but the administrative work and worry were not likely to encourage an *afflatus* such as Wordsworth had had in the great years. It was, perhaps, inevitable. He had a growing family to support. Prudence, or what Blake called Moral Virtue, won the day. Though

*The Excursion* came out in 1814, the stamp business occupied much of Wordsworth's thoughts at the very time that Coleridge was in sodden anguish in London, Bristol and Calne.

Not for over five years after the reconciliation did they meet again, nor was that interval one of very cordial mutual thoughts. Coleridge's failure to come north and console his friends after little Thomas's death was deeply felt. His sufferings and his self-indulgences had indeed brought him to a state when he had little or no imaginative sympathy with others. Instead there was a maudlin emotionalism and a prickliness which sometimes amounted almost to persecution mania. Nor could there be a friendly correspondence with one who only wrote if he wanted something and could not be trusted to open letters sent to him. He had quite given up the care for his sons' education which had been part of the original separation plan. They remained at the Ambleside School, but, whoever paid their fees, it was not their father. For many years after the reconciliation of 1812 Dorothy's occasional references to Coleridge are resigned or even scornful, though at first she was touched by his letter about little Thomas and thought of him 'with my wonted affection'. Coleridge took no immediate notice of *The Excursion* when it came out in 1814. No doubt he was disappointed with it, but Book I, 'The Pedlar' as it was originally called, had once excited his admiration. The discussions between the characters, the Wanderer, the Solitary, 'I' and the clergyman, were based on discussions which had taken place not only in



Wordsworth's own mind but between Wordsworth and Coleridge. *The Excursion* tried to do what Coleridge had urged in 1799, to save what could be saved from the wreck of revolutionary hopes. If it tried also to save something that was pre-revolutionary, that was an interesting and perhaps valuable addition. Coleridge might have taken the publication of *The Excursion* as an opportunity to show that, though disappointed as a critic, he was still a friend and that the reconciliation was genuine. He took no more notice of the new and augmented edition of Wordsworth's poems which appeared in 1815.

This lack of notice was reciprocated by Wordsworth. He may have been justifiably annoyed at finding that *Sibylline Leaves* (August 1817) contained Coleridge's 1807 poem on hearing *The Prelude* read. Two years earlier Wordsworth had written asking him not to print it, since his own poem was still unpublished 'and my work, when it appears, would labour under a great disadvantage in consequence of such a precursorship of Praise'. Coleridge's reply, if not an absolute promise to refrain, must have been taken as such by Wordsworth. The mild camouflage of *To a Gentleman* instead of *To W. Wordsworth* can have deceived no one. In July 1817 *Biographia Literaria* had been published. On 19 September <sup>1</sup> Wordsworth wrote to an acquaintance, who seems to have asked whether he had read what was supposed to be Jeffrey's review of the *Biographia* in the August *Edinburgh Review*, 'I have not read Mr. Coleridge's "Biographia", having contented myself with

<sup>1</sup> Misdated 'June?' by de Selincourt.

skimming parts of it'; still less had he read Jeffrey—  
'Indeed I am heartily sick of even the best criticism.'

The *Biographia* does not treat Wordsworth as impeccable; it disagrees<sup>1</sup> with his statements of his views on poetic diction, it dissociates—at certain points—Coleridge's poetic theory from Wordsworth's, but it was the first sympathetic and understanding examination on a considerable scale of Wordsworth's published poetry as a whole. It was the work of one (not, of course, himself impeccable) who obviously considered Wordsworth so great a poet that nothing he had written was unimportant: it implies that he was what Coleridge had always thought—the greatest English poet since Milton. Yet Wordsworth, who perhaps read more of it after September, told Crabb Robinson in December that the *Biographia Literaria* had given him no pleasure. The praise he thought extravagant, and the censure inconsiderate. He was not, in fact, on very good terms with Coleridge just then, but something else had happened to Wordsworth. For many years he had fought a hard fight over his poetry, never once had he turned back or faltered. Advice or criticism from the trusted friends of the inner circle he would consider and often accept, but at the same time his education of them was deliberate and unremitting. Publication or not might be a matter of pence or prudence. His truth to himself, to his self-dedication was never consciously belied. In the outside world his poetry had been misunderstood, unpopular, ridiculed. He had remained faithful, but an

<sup>1</sup> See p. 77.



Abdiel may develop an excessive self-sufficiency. Perhaps we shall understand what had by this time happened in Wordsworth if we look at him as Keats saw him, for Keats—a half-perceived meteor—was just beginning to shoot across the early evening skies of Wordsworth and Coleridge.

In December 1817 Keats was twenty-two and finishing *Endymion*. Nine months before he had published his first volume, which ends with *Sleep and Poetry*. He was deeply influenced by Wordsworth. He thought *The Excursion* wonderful, but it was the account of the poet's progress in *Tintern Abbey* which Keats, also a dedicated poet, took most to heart. In *Sleep and Poetry*, in *Endymion* and, later, in *The Fall of Hyperion* we see his application to himself of Wordsworth's three stages and his realization that the poet must fuse love of Nature with love of Man. Wordsworth heard 'The still, sad music of humanity': Keats would be 'A humanist, physician to all men'. At the end of 1817 Keats was emerging from the second stage, the 'Chamber of Maiden Thought' as he calls it in the famous letter to Reynolds of 3 May 1818, and beginning to explore 'dark passages'—Wordsworth's genius 'is explorative of those dark Passages. . . . He is a genius and superior to us, in so far as he can, more than we, make discoveries and shed a light in them. Here I must think Wordsworth is deeper than Milton.' The strong poetic link between Keats and Wordsworth is appropriately commemorated by their both appearing as figures in Haydon's 'Christ's Entry into Jerusalem': in the centre is Wordsworth, a very old-looking fifty,

and immediately above him, in profile with his mouth open, is young Keats.

Keats first met Wordsworth at Haydon's 'immortal dinner' on 28 December 1817, followed by tea at which Lamb could not contain himself at the absurd contrast between the unconscious banalities of Kingston, the Controller of Stamps, and Wordsworth, the very consciously supreme poet. Wordsworth was very kind to Keats that winter, asked him to meals and met him elsewhere. His famous remark on hearing Keats read the hymn to Pan from *Endymion*, 'A very pretty piece of paganism', was perhaps not far from the mark, nor do we hear of any discouragement given by him to Keats. Yet Keats the admirer of Wordsworth the poet was disappointed in Wordsworth the elderly doctrinaire. Wordsworth, wrote Keats, 'left a bad impression wherever he has visited in town by his egotism, Vanity, and bigotry, yet he is a great poet if not a philosopher'. 'Are we', he asked, 'to be bullied into a certain Philosophy engendered in the whims of an Egotist?' His description of Wordsworth's poetry as 'the egotistical sublime' has never been forgotten (Keats, we must remember, never saw *The Prelude*). His description misses the mark quite badly, but it exactly indicates how disappointed Keats was by his personal acquaintance with the admired author—a disappointment which was none the less real for being partly due to Keats's own circle of friends at that time.

This, then, was the Wordsworth who once again, after five and a half years, met Coleridge, perhaps by chance, certainly at other people's houses. The meeting



was watched with curiosity. Wordsworth was awkward and constrained. Mrs Clarkson wrote: 'A man of the world in Wordsworth's place would have been kind before strangers, cold in private. Wordsworth's better nature I have no doubt would make him affectionate in private and only cold before strangers because his whole mind could not be expressed before them.' At Lamb's there were 'parties congregated round the two poets, but Coleridge had a thicker mass than Wordsworth', as Crabb Robinson reported. Coleridge was now quite grey-haired.

Wordsworth may have felt colder than Mrs. Clarkson thought. It is improbable that Coleridge had thanked Wordsworth for the trouble which he had taken, in conjunction with Southey and others, to ensure Hartley's university education. It is almost certain that he had even, at short notice, taken Hartley to Oxford for matriculation<sup>1</sup> on 6 May 1815. Hartley was now

<sup>1</sup> From New Inn Hall, according to Foster's *Alumni Oxonienses*, but he certainly went into residence at Merton on the day he matriculated. For the full story of the Oriel Fellowship see *Letters of Hartley Coleridge* (G. E. and E. L. Griggs, 1936). He was elected after a five-day examination, in April 1819, for a probationary year, to a fellowship restricted to natives of Gloucestershire and Worcestershire (Hartley was born at Bristol). He had two competitors, whom he left so far behind that it was impossible to reject him '*odditatis causâ*'. There were misgivings, put aside in an almost malign optimism—he could be 'rallied out of his oddities'. It was not oddities, but some intemperance and a complete inability to conform to the Senior Common Room discipline (like that of a strict officers' mess), which made the College decide it could not continue him beyond the probationary year. Oriel had taken and was taking a leading part in the reformation of the University from eighteenth-century slackness. Hartley could not possibly fit in with such eminent pre-Victorians as the Dean (Whately,

only a year from his final examination in November 1818. The sudden collapse in 1820 of Hartley's Oxford career perhaps helped to effect a *détente*, at first only on the Wordsworth side, between Coleridge and the Wordsworth family, for Hartley was and remained beloved by all. The sins of the father visited on the child may have brought understanding and forgiveness for the father; though it is not until 1823 that there is a more cordial atmosphere all round. In 1825 Dorothy can once more refer to 'dear Coleridge'.

The news that Hartley's fellowship would not be continued was broken to Coleridge on or about 1 July 1820. Wordsworth was then in London (he wrote to Coleridge on 8 July regretting that he had seen so little of him), but it is pretty clear that he knew nothing of the disaster when on 10 July he left for a Continental tour from which he did not return to London till 9 November. In the interval Coleridge fought hard for his son. He wrote giving Wordsworth's name as that of one who had known Hartley all his life and could guarantee that there was no vice in him. He went to Oxford in October before the formal meeting at Oriel which would officially settle the matter. It was all in vain. He remained convinced that Hartley was the victim of calumny. The fact is that the wonder-child, the 'limber elf', was wholly unsuited to the new

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afterwards Archbishop of Dublin), the Junior Treasurer and Tutor (Keble, kindest of men), the Subdean and Tutor (Hawkins, afterwards Provost) and Thomas Arnold. The Provost was Copleston, once Professor of Poetry, ironically the instrument of dismissing two poets from Oxford—for it was he who had denounced Shelley.



earnestness. His entering for the fellowship was a disastrous mistake from which he never recovered: but he became almost a great writer—and he was always beloved.

In November 1820, after his return from the Continent, Wordsworth saw Coleridge at Highgate. They must have talked about Hartley, and it may have been difficult. Though 'to be beloved' may still have been all he needed, Coleridge had suffered as severe a shock in 1810 as he had inflicted in 1806, and he had brooded over it for many years. In these years shortly before and after Hartley's catastrophe he unburdened himself to a new friend, Thomas Allsop, of grievances old and new. Nevertheless he eventually mellowed. He had acquired self-control (with very occasional minor relapses), he was back at the Great Work, he realized that he had sometimes been mistaken. One ceases to suspect persecution mania. In the springs of 1823 and 1824 he and Wordsworth met at parties in London. On 4 May 1825 Dorothy writes of 'an unusual event, a letter from Coleridge'. Anxious to do what little he could for Gillman, Coleridge had written to her to 'use your interest in recommending Mr. Gilman as . . . medical attendant' for someone who was coming to live at Highgate. Three years later relations were back on such a happy footing that Wordsworth and Coleridge spent several weeks (21 June to 7 August 1828) together on the Continent, accompanied by another Dorothy, Wordsworth's twenty-three-year-old daughter known as 'Dora' or 'Doro'. 'I have been rambling on the Continent',

Wordsworth wrote to Sir Walter Scott, 'with my Daughter and Mr. Coleridge. . . . Our principal objects were the Rhine and Holland, and Flanders, which countries were not new to me, but were revisited with great interest in such pleasant company. You would have enjoyed floating down the Meuse and the Rhine with us.' They were old men now. They 'get on famously', Dora reported, 'but that Mr. C. sometimes detains them with his fiddle-faddling'. The wheel had come full circle: here was Dora using Aunt Dorothy's very expression about Mrs. Coleridge all those years ago.

They were old in every way. Since the great days a whole generation of young poets had grown up and died—Byron, Shelley, Keats. The French Revolution and all its hopes had died. They were back in the eighteenth century which had indeed almost returned. A brother of Louis XVI was still King of France, the little kingdoms and principalities of Germany and Italy were much as before, the amalgamation of the Austrian Netherlands with Holland was a minor and temporary change. One still travelled by chaise or diligence, though Coleridge had experienced his first steamboat (to Ramsgate) in 1825. The old gentlemen enjoyed the new peace which had arisen in them and around them. They had seen too much of political and social change to think that any good could come of it. Though they were intellectually still very much alive, and though both retained their intellectual independence to the last, they were happiest in this renewed eighteenth century which was so soon to end with



Catholic Emancipation and the Reform Bill and London University (in this very year) and Queen Victoria. The gleam had long since gone, but so had the fears about 'mighty Poets in their misery dead'. What had happened to them?—to them both? We can only guess at what are called causes. Only 'the Shade Of that which once was great' remained, majestic though both the Shades were. Yet the imagination need not be as mortal as the body. The year before there had died, in poverty and obscurity and after much physical suffering, an older man who worked on his death-bed at his grand Illustrations of Dante and who described himself as 'an old man, feeble and tottering, but not in spirit and life, not in the real man, the imagination, which liveth for ever. In that I am stronger and stronger, as this foolish body decays.'

The old friends had other meetings in the winter of 1830-1. Those were the last. Coleridge died in the early morning of Friday 25 July 1834. It was melancholy news for Wordsworth and it set him thinking and talking of Coleridge, but it was not felt as a tremendous loss. 'The last year has thinned off so many of my friends', as if Coleridge had not once been in a class by himself. It was a 'frail tie' that was broken. Fortunately Wordsworth did not feel called on to compose a poem for the occasion. Not for more than a year, not till in November 1835 the death of James Hogg, 'the Ettrick Shepherd', called forth an *Extempore Effusion*, did Wordsworth write his memorable lines on Coleridge. Hogg and Scott, Coleridge and Lamb, Crabbe and

Mrs. Hemans had all gone in the last three years, all were lamented in eleven of the best stanzas of Wordsworth's later life.

Nor has the rolling year twice measured,  
From sign to sign, its steadfast course,  
Since every mortal power of Coleridge  
Was frozen at its marvellous source;

The rapt One, of the godlike forehead,  
The heaven-eyed creature sleeps in earth:  
And Lamb, the frolic and the gentle,  
Has vanished from his lonely hearth.

Wordsworth's genuine attitude to death is Stoic and hopeless. He was now 'orthodox', a practising Churchman, but he had—to his distress—no firm Christian consolation about death. His early disbelief in death, so far as that disbelief existed, was based on a childish fancy. There is nothing very real in *We Are Seven*. Yet the natural man had not always risen up successfully against the spiritual man. In passages of *The Prelude* and, above all, in the second part of the great *Ode* (the understanding of which has not been helped by overmuch insistence on 'recollections of early childhood') Wordsworth came very near to Blake's 'eternity', the interpenetration of the natural by the spiritual, the revelation of the everlasting now. That faded. Coleridge's 'every mortal power' does not genuinely suggest that he had any powers which were not mortal: his powers were frozen with his body, which—how horrified Blake would have been!—was their source. Death was the end. Coleridge was dead.



John Wordsworth was dead. Peggy Hutchinson was dead.

No motion has she now, no force;  
She neither hears nor sees,  
Rolled round in earth's diurnal course  
With rocks and stones and trees!

## CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

1770

William Wordsworth born (7 April).  
Mary Hutchinson born (16 August).

1771

Dorothy Wordsworth born (25 December).

1772

Margaret Hutchinson (Peggy) born.  
Coleridge born (21 October).  
John Wordsworth born.

1778

Death of Wordsworth's mother.

1781

Death of Coleridge's father.

1783

Death of Wordsworth's father.  
Death of the Hutchinsons' mother.

1785

Death of the Hutchinsons' father.

1787

Wordsworth at Cambridge (till 1791).

1790

Wordsworth's Long Vacation tour in France and  
Switzerland.



1791

Coleridge at Cambridge (till end of 1794).

Wordsworth in France (till December 1792).

1792

Birth of Wordsworth's daughter Caroline (6 December).

1793

*Descriptive Sketches* and *An Evening Walk* published.

War with France.

Wordsworth's probable dash to France (October).

Coleridge a dragoon (December till April 1794).

1794

Coleridge meets Southey and becomes a Pantisocrat (June).

1795

Raisley Calvert's legacy to Wordsworth.

First meeting of Wordsworth and Coleridge (Bristol).

Wordsworth and Dorothy at Racedown (26 September).

Coleridge marries Sarah Fricker (4 October).

1796

Death of Peggy Hutchinson (March).

Coleridge's *Poems* published.

Birth of Hartley Coleridge (19 September).

Coleridge settles at Nether Stowey (31 December).

1797

Wordsworth visits Coleridge at Stowey (March).

Coleridge visits Wordsworth at Racedown (June).

The Wordsworths move into Alfoxden (16 July).

*Kubla Khan* (October or November).

*The Ancient Mariner* (begun 13 November, finished March 1798).

## 1798

Beginning of *The Recluse*.

*Lyrical Ballads*.

The Wordsworths and Coleridge go to Germany  
(September).

## 1799

The Wordsworths at Sockburn (May) and Grasmere  
(December).

Wordsworth and Coleridge tour the Lake Country  
(October, November).

Coleridge meets Sarah Hutchinson.

## 1800

Coleridge settles at Keswick (July).

*Lyrical Ballads*, second edition (published January  
1801).

## 1801

Coleridge's health breaks down.

Coleridge winters in London (November to March  
1802).

## 1802

Communication with Annette reopened.

Treaty of Amiens (25 March).

Wordsworth's *Ode* and Coleridge's *Dejection*.

✓ Wordsworth marries Mary Hutchinson (4 October).

Coleridge in London for most of winter (November to  
April 1803, except Christmas-time).

## 1803

The War renewed (May).

Wordsworth, Dorothy, and Coleridge tour Scotland  
(August, September).



1804

*The Prelude* I-V finished before Coleridge leaves England.

Coleridge in Malta and Sicily.

*The Prelude* continued (finished 1805).

1805

John Wordsworth drowned (6 February).

Coleridge in Malta, Sicily, and Italy.

1806

Coleridge returns (17 August), decides to separate from his wife, meets the Wordsworths at Kendal (26 October), and joins them at Coleorton (December).

1807

Coleridge's poem on hearing *The Prelude* read.

Wordsworth's 1807 volumes.

Coleridge in Bristol, Stowey, and London.

1808

The Wordsworths move to Allan Bank, where Coleridge joins them.

1809

Coleridge's *The Friend* (1 June 1809 to 15 March 1810).

Death of Coleridge's mother.

1810

Coleridge at Keswick (May to October).

Coleridge goes to London (October).

The quarrel of Wordsworth and Coleridge (October 1810 to May 1812).

1811

Wordsworth moves to Grasmere parsonage.

1812

Wordsworth and Coleridge reconciled (May), but  
Coleridge never returned to the north.

1813

Wordsworth made Distributor of Stamps.  
Wordsworth moves to Rydal Mount.

1814

*The Excursion* published.

1815

Coleridge at Calne.  
End of the war.

1816

Marriage of Caroline Wordsworth to Jean Baudouin.  
Coleridge settles with Dr. Gillman at Highgate.  
*Kubla Khan*, *Christabel* and *The Pains of Sleep*  
published.

1817

*Biographia Literaria* and *Sibylline Leaves* published.

1820

Hartley Coleridge loses his Oriel Fellowship.  
Wordsworth's first Continental visit since 1802.

1828

Wordsworth and Coleridge tour the Continent (June to  
August).



200 WORDSWORTH AND COLERIDGE 1795-1834

1831

Last meeting of Wordsworth and Coleridge.

1834

Death of Coleridge (25 July).

1850

Death of Wordsworth.

1832  
1772

60

Age of Coleridge

Wordsworth: 1850  
1720

130

80

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# INDEX

- Adams, Joseph, 178  
 Allsop, Thomas, 190  
 Arnold, Matthew, 112, 176
- Baldwin, Cecilia, 48  
 Ball, Sir Alexander, 147, 169  
 Bartram, William, 27, 51  
 Beaumont, Sir George, 116, 144, 152, 172  
 Beddoes, Thomas, 92, 117, 177  
 Biggs, Nathaniel, 75-6  
 Blake, William, 10, 20, 71, 125, 132, 177, 182, 192-3  
 Bowles, William Lisle, 17  
 Bruce, James, 28  
 Brun, Friederika, 115  
 Buttermere, Maid of, 137  
 Byron, Lord, 37, 191
- Calvert, Raisley, 12-3, 79, 85, 196  
 Canning, George, 61  
 Carter, John, 179-81  
 Chester, John, 43, 46, 48, 62  
 Clarkson, Catherine, 171, 188  
 Clarkson, Thomas, 66, 154, 173  
 Coleridge, Berkeley, 20, 31, 43, 52, 58, 63  
 Coleridge, Derwent, 85, 155, 172, 183  
 Coleridge, Hartley, 5, 31, 38, 43, 58, 93, 95, 124-5, 144, 155, 172, 183, 188-90, 196, 199  
 Coleridge, Samuel Taylor, *passim*:  
*Ancient Mariner, The*, 13, 15-16, 18-19, 23-9, 32-3, 35-6, 38, 49, 59-60, 80-2, 93, 95, 196
- Biographia Literaria*, 2, 7, 28-9, 45, 78, 127, 167-8, 178, 184-5, 199  
*Chamouny The Hour before Sunrise*, 115, 123, 168;  
*Christabel*, 19, 22-3, 25, 28-32, 38, 76, 79-83, 85, 88, 93, 95, 115, 199;  
*Conciones ad Populum*, 7  
*Dark Ladie, The*, 29, 69;  
*Dejection*, 60, 99, 100, 104-8, 197; *Dungeon, The*, 94  
*Eolian Harp, The*, 2, 25, 93, 105, 131  
*Fears in Solitude*, 19, 30, 43-4, 95; *Foster-Mother's Tale, The*, 94; *France: An Ode*, 19, 30, 43, 95;  
*Friend, The*, 45, 154, 161-70, 172, 179, 198  
*Great Work, The*, 63, 72-4, 85, 129, 178, 190  
*Hexameters*, 59  
*Joan of Arc*, 35  
*Kubla Khan*, 18, 24, 26, 28, 49, 88, 196, 199  
*Lectures*, 154, 158-9, 171, 177-8; *Lewti*, 30, 43, 56;  
*Love*, 69, 79  
*Nightingale, The*, 19, 30, 33, 38-9, 43, 95  
*Osorio (Remorse)*, 9, 17, 24-5, 33, 177-8  
*Pains of Sleep*, 84, 120-1, 126, 157, 199; *Plot Discovered, The*, 7; *Poems on Various Subjects*, 3, 7;  
*Poems*, 35  
*Religious Musings*, 25; *Re-visiting the Sea-Shore, On*, 96



- Satyrane's Letters*, 45, 168;  
*Shurton Bars, Lines*  
*written at*, 3; *Sibylline*  
*Leaves*, 167, 178, 184, 199  
*Table Talk*, 128; *This Lime-*  
*Tree Bower My Prison*,  
 93-4  
*Wallenstein*, Schiller's, 64,  
 72; *Watchman, The*, 3, 7,  
 14, 86; *W. Wordsworth*,  
*To*, 144-6, 184  
 Coleridge, Sara, 107, 114, 155  
 Coleridge, Sara(h)<sup>1</sup> (*née*  
*Fricker*), 2, 9, 16-7, 30-1,  
 43, 47, 58, 63, 69, 80,  
 85-6, 88, 90-4, 97, 113-4,  
 118, 124, 144, 152, 154-6,  
 158, 160, 191, 196, 198  
 Cookson, William, 1, 113  
 Cottle, Joseph, 2-3, 20, 30-1,  
 33-5, 66-7, 74, 79, 177  
 Dampier, William, 122  
 Darwin, Erasmus, 36  
 Davy, Humphry, 64, 76, 82,  
 92, 97, 162  
 De Quincey, Thomas, 155,  
 158  
*Encyclopedia Britannica*, 117  
 Evans, Mary, 9  
 Fenwick, Isabella, 139  
 Fox, Charles James, 77  
 Gilbert, Sir Humphrey, 121  
 Gill, Joseph, 36  
 Gillman, James, 178, 190, 199  
 Glover, Richard, 46  
 Gray, Thomas, 38  
 Green, Joseph Henry, 178  
 Hancock, Robert, 15-6, 24  
 Haydon, Benjamin Robert,  
 182, 186-7  
 Hayley, William, 10  
 Hazlitt, William, 14, 16, 19-  
 20, 24, 31, 43  
 Hutchinson, George, 53, 67,  
 96  
 Hutchinson, Joanna, 67  
 Hutchinson, Margaret  
 (Peggy), 52-8, 194-6  
 Hutchinson, Mary (Mrs  
 Wordsworth), 48, 52-8,  
 67, 69, 89, 97-9, 103-5,  
 116, 137, 139, 141, 155,  
 166, 170, 181-2, 195, 197  
 Hutchinson, Sara(h)<sup>1</sup>, 56, 67,  
 69-70, 90-1, 104-6, 150,  
 152-3, 160-1, 164-5, 170,  
 197  
 Hutchinson, Thomas, 53, 67,  
 96  
 Jeffrey, Francis, 184-5  
 Keats, John, 74, 82, 186-7,  
 191  
 Kingston, J., 182, 187  
 Klopstock, Gottlieb Frie-  
 drich, 46-7  
 Lamb, Charles, 3, 24-5, 30,  
 35, 64, 68, 80, 83, 94, 115,  
 124, 149, 159, 173, 182,  
 187-8, 192-3  
 Lamb, Mary, 115  
 Legouis, Emile, 176  
 Lloyd, Charles, 14, 30, 35, 83  
 Lonsdale, James Lowther,  
 Earl of, 13, 99, 180  
 Lowes, J. Livingston, 25, 28  
 'Lucy', 52-8  
*Lyrical Ballads*, 4, 20-39, 43,  
 52, 58, 65, 67, 75-82, 85,  
 93, 102, 131, 197  
 Marvell, Andrew, 124  
 Milton, John, 40, 46, 71-2,  
 129-30, 140, 177, 185-6

<sup>1</sup> Properly Sarah, but Sara to Coleridge.

- Montagu, Basil (senior), 10, 12, 58, 154, 170-3  
 Montagu, Basil (junior), 10, 12, 16, 23, 36-7, 58  
 Nelson, Horatio, 45, 147, 169  
 Pantisocracy, 4, 9, 78, 83, 196  
 Park, Mungo, 121  
 Pinney family, 1, 2, 13, 36, 89  
 Pitt, William, 6, 7, 70  
 Poole, Thomas, 5, 27, 31, 52, 57, 63, 68, 70, 74, 86-90, 96-7, 135, 154, 163  
 Ray, Martha, 36  
 Robinson, Henry Crabb, 173, 185, 188  
 St. Albyn, Mrs, 41  
 Scott, Sir Walter, 79, 191-2  
 Shelvocke, George, 27  
 Shuter, W., 24  
 Southey, Robert, 1, 2, 6, 9, 30, 35, 41, 63-4, 78, 80, 89, 96-7, 114, 117, 120, 154, 172, 188, 196  
 Stoddart, John, 149  
 Stuart, Daniel, 62-3  
 Thelwall, John, 7, 17, 24, 31, 41-3, 87  
 Thomson, James, 109  
 Tobin, James, 89  
 Vallon, Annette, 8, 10-12, 48, 52, 56-8, 98-9, 102-4, 113, 141-4, 197  
 Vandyke, Peter, 15  
 Wedgwood, Josiah, 13, 14, 19, 20, 177  
 Wedgwood, Thomas, 13, 14, 19, 107, 177  
 Wilkinson, Thomas, 163  
 Wilson, John, 167  
 Wordsworth, Caroline, 98, 102-3, 113, 119, 142-3, 196, 199  
 Wordsworth, Catherine, 179  
 Wordsworth, Christopher, 1  
 Wordsworth, Dorothy, *passim*  
 Wordsworth, Dorothy (Dora), 190-1  
 Wordsworth, John (brother), 66, 107, 150, 180, 194-5, 198  
 Wordsworth, John (son), 116  
 Wordsworth, Mary, *see* Hutchinson, Mary  
 Wordsworth, Richard, 107  
 Wordsworth, Thomas, 177, 179, 183  
 Wordsworth, William (son), 182  
 Wordsworth, William, *passim*:  
   'A slumber did my spirit seal', 51-4, 57, 194; 'A whirl-blast from behind the hill', 23; *Alice Fell*, 102; 'Among all lovely things', 54; *Anecdote for Fathers*, 36-7  
   *Ballad, A*, 56; *Beauty and Moonlight*, 56; *Beggars*, 102; *Borderers, The*, 9, 17; *Brothers, The*, 79; *Butterfly, To a*, 102  
   Chaucer translation, 93; *Complaint, A*, 156; *Complaint, The*, 57; *Convention of Cintra*, 161; *Cuckoo, To the*, 102  
   *Descriptive Sketches*, 1, 3, 7, 8, 11, 196  
   *Emigrant Mother, The*, 102-3; *Epitaphs, Essay on*, 167, 172; *Evening Walk, An*, 1, 3, 7, 8, 11, 57, 196; *Excursion, The*, 9, 21, 70-1, 102, 128, 132, 134, 139-41, 166-7, 183-4,



186, 199; *Expostulation and Reply*, 51; *Extempore Effusion*, 192-3  
*Fountain, The*, 51  
*Goody Blake, and Harry Gill*, 35; *Guilt and Sorrow* ('Salisbury Plain'), 2, 3, 9  
*H. C. Six Years Old, To*, 124; *Happy Warrior, Character of the*, 150, 156; *Hart-Leap Well*, 79; *Highland Girl, To a*, 119  
 'I travell'd among unknown men', 52, 55-6, 62; *Idiot Boy, The*, 24, 33, 37-9; *Inscription for a Seat*, 85  
*Laodamia*, 141-2; *Leech Gatherer, The* (*Resolution and Independence*), 104, 108-9, 125, 166, 192; *Liberty, Sonnets dedicated to*, 156; *Lucy Gray*, 51, 54  
*Matthew*, 51; *Michael*, 76, 80-1, 93, 139  
*Nutting*, 51, 133  
*Ode* (*Intimations of Immortality*), 99-101, 104-6, 123-5, 156, 193, 197; *Ode to Duty*, 100, 125-6, 156, 166, 176  
*Pedlar, The* (*The Ruined Cottage*), 9, 21, 82, 102, 183; *Peele Castle*, 116, 150; *Personal Talk*, 102; *Peter Bell*, 21, 23, 29, 38, 141; *Poet's Epitaph, A*,

51, 109; *Prelude, The*, 11, 21, 35, 51, 53, 67, 101, 121-3, 127-46, 150, 167, 176, 184, 187, 193, 198  
*Rainbow, The*, 102; *Recluse, The*, 21, 70-1, 128-35, 138-9, 166, 197; *River Duddon, The*, 127; *Ruth*, 28, 51, 57, 102  
*Sailor's Mother, The*, 102; *Septimi Gades*, 56-7; 'She dwelt among th' untrodden ways', 51, 54-5, 93; *Simon Lee*, 33, 37; 'Strange fits of passion', 54-5; *Subjugation of Switzerland*, 175; 'Surprised by joy', 179  
*Tables Turned, The*, 51; *Thomson's 'Castle of Indolence', Stanzas written in my Pocket-Copy of*, 108-12; *Thorn, The*, 23, 36, 81; 'Three years she grew', 52, 58; *Tintern Abbey*, 21, 26, 33-5, 42, 51, 57, 80-1, 92, 95, 186; *Two April Mornings, The*, 51  
*Vaudracour and Julia*, 142-3  
*Waggoner, The*, 166; *We are Seven*, 34, 89, 125, 193; 'While Anna's peers', 39; *White Doe of Rylstone, The*, 159

Young, Edward, 35

Young Ed

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